



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

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ORSAM

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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
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1. IRAQ

- **Iraqi army attacks Peshmarga near Syrian border**

ERBIL, July 27 (AKnews)- Two Iraqi brigades assaulted the 8th Brigade of Peshmarga (Kurdistan border guards) near Iraqi-Syrian border early today morning, Kurdish Xedan news agency said.

Kurdish forces in Khapur and Zumar districts have responded to the attack which still continues, the source cited Anwar Haji Osman, deputy for Kurdistan peshmarga minister.

Osman said Iraqi army moved from the Rabia area and advanced towards Qahira district to assault peshmarga forces.

He warned if the army did not withdraw, they will have another response and force them to retreat.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/318902/>

- **Kurdistani MP: Questioning al-Maliki is our closest option at present time.**

Baghdad / NINA / MP, for the Kurdistan Alliance, Qassim Mohammed said that "paper of the political reforms announced

by the National Alliance is not feasible or beneficial at the present time."

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: " a significant political mobility is happening today in order to get out of the political crisis, but we see that the reforms at the present time, as they were put, is not feasible or beneficial."

He added: "The previous dialogues lasted more than eight months and resulted in Arbil agreement, which formed the government , then later some of the blocs / unnamed / denied some of the terms of the agreements, then today the talk is back about dialogue, we think that the dialogue this time may continue for more than a year and there is no guarantees to achieve what will be agreed upon."

He continued: "The political blocs, if they want to prove good faith, it shall first apply what has been agreed upon in Arbil, and then we start talking about the remaining problems without that, the interrogation of the Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is the closest option to us at the present time."/End

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

- **Al-Mutlaq: the meeting with Al-Maliki was friendly and positive.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq described his meeting with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki as friendly and positive.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The meeting dealt with the tense political situation, whether internal or on the issues surrounding Iraq, because of the crises experienced by the region and their effect on Iraq."

He added: "The meeting stressed on the need to overcome all differences and to go towards one project which is to preserve the unity of Iraq" adding: " we have emphasized the need for a comprehensive national reconciliation and a general amnesty for all Iraqis, with the exception of those who proven that ,their hands stained with the blood of Iraqis. "

He explained: "The meeting also stressed on the need to resolve the political crisis in the country through the understanding

and the dialogue to develop a general strategy for the management of the country."

It is mentioned that , the relationship between Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his deputy al-Mutlaq saw recently a major tension due to al-Mutlaq's description to the Prime Minister as dictator which irritated Maliki, who described these statements as unacceptable. / End

Member of al Anbar provincial council : More than two thousand Syrian refugees arrived to al Qaim city Barham Salih discusses with U.S. Consul in Kurdistan, bilateral relations.

Parliament to meet on Thursday in exception of the announced day off Sari, Hakeem discuss the political crisis, means to solve it

Educational cooperation between Najaf province, Iran . Governor of Nineveh welcoming of Iraqis returning from Syria, but waiting for opening by Syrian authorities Alyaarobiyah border port.

Iraqiya List holds meeting in the Parliament headed by Allawi. Maliki

discusses with his Kuwaiti counterpart the Arab and international latest developments.

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

- **Iraqiya renews call to accelerate interrogation of PM Maliki**

ERBIL, July 26 (AKnews) - Iraqiya List said Thursday that its MPs insist on calling for the rapid interrogation of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the Council of Representatives.

The list said in a statement that its leader Ayad Allawi yesterday met MPs from his coalition and discussed the internal and regional situation.

The participants stressed the need to expedite the process of questioning the PM following constitutional and democratic methods.

According to the statement, Allawi stressed the need to unite and confront all attempts to harm the unity of Iraq and the Iraqi national project, and the intimidation and temptation that the MPs face.

The attendees also condemned the unstable security situation and the suffering of citizens because of the recent bomb blasts that they say the government is responsible for.

According to the statement they also stressed the need to release innocent detainees that Iraqiya have support for several months now, and to accelerate the transfer of Iraqis in Syria to Iraq.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/318814/>

- **Barzani meets with delegation from Tuz components**



Barzani Kurdistan president meets with a delegation from Tuz Khormato components

Massoud Barzani Kurdistan region President received Thursday in Erbil a delegation from Tuz Khormato administrative representatives and components including Kurds, Turkmens and Arabs.

The meeting aimed at exposing many of the problems of the town people are suffering from especially security concerns.

The town's mayor Shalal Abdul on behalf of all components suggested forming a joint regiment containing the Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens to protect the spirit of co-existence from the terrorist's threats they face every day.

Lack of electricity supply, lack of employment, renewing several schools and implementing a range of small projects were amongst the issues discussed with Barzani.

Barzani, for his part, vowed to step up his efforts to find solutions to the town's problems.

Tuz Khormato is a town in Salahaddin province, located 55 miles south of Kirkuk.

The town is ethnically mixed between Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/kurdistan-region/1780-barzani-meets-with-delegation-from-tuz-components>

- **Diyala: Al-Qaida terrorists clash with Iraqi security forces**

Iraqi security forces face Al-Qaida clashes More than 14 police officers have been injured and killed in Diyala Thursday in a clash between Iraqi security forces and Al-Qaida terrorists.

"In the last 24 hours, 14 policemen from the Iraqi security force have been killed and injured in Diyala on Thursday as clashes between Al-Qaida terrorist groups and Iraqi security forces intensify," a police official told PUKmedia.

Amid the clashes which claimed the lives of 6 Al-Qaida members, more than 30 wanted terrorists have been taken into custody by Iraqi forces.

The Al-Qaida offensive declared earlier this week promised to take back territories overpowered by U.S. troops

during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. The infamous terrorist group claimed responsibility for the lives of more than 110 civilians across Iraq in the most brutal attack since 2010.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/iraq/1779-diyala-al-qaida-terrorists-clash-with-iraqi-security-forces>

2. IRAN

- **Official: Hosting NAM Summit to Boost Iran's Diplomacy**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Hosting the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) by Iran will boost Tehran's diplomatic power, a senior Iranian official said.

The 16th NAM summit will be held in Tehran from August 26 to 31.

Iran will assume the rotating presidency of the movement from Egypt for three years during the upcoming summit.

Speaking to the Islamic republic news agency, Iranian Deputy Interior Minister for Political Affairs Seyed Sowlat Mortazavi said the summit is a golden

opportunity for Iran and it will promote Iran's diplomatic capability.

Given the wave of propaganda raised by the western states against Iran, hosting the summit is of paramount significance, he noted.

Referring to the wrong claims by the West, Mortazavi said that Iran will never be isolated under any condition.

Earlier, Iranian officials said that all the members of the Non-Aligned Movement have declared their readiness to attend the bloc's foreign ministerial and heads-of-state meetings in Tehran late August.

"All the 120 members of the Movement will attend the meeting," Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi told reporters on the sidelines of today's cabinet meeting in Tehran.

Iran also announced earlier this month that over 30 presidents have announced their readiness to attend the gathering.

NAM is comprised of some 120 member states and 17 observer countries.

NAM is an international organization of states considering themselves not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. NAM is the largest grouping of countries outside of the United Nations.

NAM member states represent nearly two-thirds of the United Nations' members and comprise 55% of the world population, particularly countries considered to be developing.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251649>

- **VP: Iran to Remain Beside Syrian Nation**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian First Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi praised the resistance shown by the Syrian people against enemy plots, and reiterated that Tehran will always remain on the side of the Syrian nation and government.

"Under such conditions that the entire major world powers have united to inflict a severe blow to Syria, the Syrian nation is united and solidly resisting, and Iran would always remain by the side of its

Syrian brethren," Rahimi said in a meeting with Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Omar Ibrahim Ghalawanji in Tehran on Wednesday.

The Iranian official emphasized the need for preserving national unity and elevating resistance against the enemies, adding, "President Bashar al-Assad's reforms process in Syria has been a very positive and constructive move and we hope in a very near future the signs of defeat of the enemies and the victory of the Syrian nation would become evident."

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011 with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

Hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed, when some protest rallies turned into armed clashes.

The government blames outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups for the deaths, stressing that the unrest is being orchestrated from abroad.

In October, calm was eventually restored in the Arab state after President Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but Israel, the US and its Arab allies are seeking hard to bring the country into chaos through any possible means. Tel Aviv, Washington and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots in the hope of increasing unrests in Syria.

The US daily, Washington Post, reported in May that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups battling the President Bashar al-Assad's government have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

The newspaper, quoting opposition activists and US and foreign officials, reported that Obama administration officials emphasized the administration has expanded contacts with opposition military forces to provide the Persian Gulf nations with assessments of rebel credibility and command-and-control infrastructure.

According to the report, material is being stockpiled in Damascus, in Idlib near the

Turkish border and in Zabadani on the Lebanese border.

Opposition activists who four months ago said the rebels were running out of ammunition said in May that the flow of weapons - most bought on the black market in neighboring countries or from elements of the Syrian military in the past - has significantly increased after a decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month.

(Fars News)

- **Iran: Israel Only Culprit behind Bus Explosion in Bulgaria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Mohammad Khazayee categorically denied the allegations raised by the Zionist regime about Tehran's involvement in a terrorist attack in Bulgaria, and said Israel is the only regime able to plot and carry out such terrorist acts.

"It's amazing that just a few minutes after the terrorist attack, Israeli officials announced that Iran was behind it,"

Khazayee said, addressing a UN Security Council meeting.

He said that Iran condemns any form of terrorist act, emphasizing that such acts could only be carried out by Israel itself.

"While condemning any terrorist attack in whatever form and manifestation, with regard to the terrorist attack in Bulgaria, I should make it clear that we have never (engaged) and will not engage in such a despicable attempt," he added.

"Such a terrorist operation could only be planned and carried out by the same regime whose short history is full of state terrorism operations and assassinations aimed at implicating others for narrow political gains," he said.

The Iranian envoy said that he could provide many examples showing that the regime "killed its own citizens and innocent Jewish people during the last couple of decades".

He said that Iran was itself a victim of terrorism, citing the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists as an example.

A deadly attack against Israeli tourists took place in the Black Sea city of Burgas, 400 kilometers (248 miles) East of the Bulgarian capital Sofia, last week.

Israeli officials accused Iran and the Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah of carrying out the attack.

In relevant remarks, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast, too, strongly rejected the allegations, and said, "The Zionist regime as master of state and organized terrorism has its hands in blood of innocent Lebanese, Palestinian and other nationalities."

The diplomat pointed out that the Zionist regime that has a direct role in terror of Iran's nuclear scientists engages in lodging baseless accusations against other countries in order to distract the attention of the international community from its terrorist activities being carried out throughout the world.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251549>

- **Iran, P5+1 will continue talks to get results: Velayati**

Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei

The Islamic Republic of Iran should be permitted to use peaceful nuclear energy and such a right should be recognized by negotiators of the P5+1.”

Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution

A senior Iranian official says the Islamic Republic and the six major world powers (P5+1) will proceed with their multifaceted talks to eventually achieve “positive and constructive” results.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran should be allowed to use peaceful nuclear energy and such a right should be recognized by negotiators of the P5+1,” Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei told reporters on Thursday.

He made a reference to the latest round of the deputy-level negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 in the Turkish city of

Istanbul and said the Islamic Republic has a “principled and logical” stance, which was announced during the talks.

Deputy Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Baqeri and deputy to the EU foreign policy chief Helga Schmid ended their day-long talks in Istanbul on Tuesday.

The Tuesday meeting was held three weeks after Iran and the P5+1, comprising Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany, held an expert-level meeting on July 3 in Istanbul with the participation of representatives and experts from both sides.

The two sides had agreed to hold the expert-level talks during their negotiations in the Russian capital, Moscow, in June.

The Moscow meetings came after three sessions of plenary talks in Baghdad in May and an earlier round of negotiations in Istanbul in mid-April.

The two sides had, prior to the Istanbul talks, held two rounds of negotiations, one in Geneva, Switzerland, in December

2010, and another in Istanbul in January 2011.

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

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

[http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/27/253005/iranp51-talks-to-go-on-until-fruition/](http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/27/253005/iranp51-talks-to-go-on-until-fruit/)

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Syrian nightmare for Israel**

Op-ed: Islamist rise in post-Assad Syria may find Israel surrounded by radical Muslim elements

Alex Fishman

Intelligence information collected and analyzed by the CIA shows that Israel has many causes for concern about the day

after Assad. It turns out that there is a fundamental gap between what the White House says about events in Syria or what will happen after Assad goes and the disturbing picture taking shape at CIA headquarters in Langley.

The CIA is engaged in an intensive race against time to acquire information about Syria's arsenal of chemical and biological weapons. The investment is huge, ranging from field agents dispatched to reinforce CIA stations in the region to technological intelligence, satellite images and so on. In fact, everything offered by modern technology is being invested in Syria at this time.

CIA officials are working with regional intelligence bodies – such as Turkey's and Jordan's spy agencies – and collecting information from Syrian army defectors in order to map out the body known as the “rebels” and categorize them: Who will be cooperating with the US Administration in the future, who will be serving the interests of radical Islam, and whether someone among them can be trusted on the chemical weapons issue.

This intelligence information prompted several leaks, which apparently reflect reality. One of them referred to the possibility that Jordanian commandoes would take over Syria's chemical and biological sites. The second referred to the possibility that Israel will be bombing these sites. Yet another report revealed that the US Administration formulated contingency plans for taking over border crossings, airports and seaports in Syria to prevent the transfer of chemical and biological weapons and nab fleeing terrorists.

Here we can add another assumption: The assassination of top Syrian defense officials was not necessarily carried out by the rebels. This story has too many hallmarks of a blow delivered by an orderly spy agency capable of penetrating through the security around Syria's top brass. Turkish intelligence, for example, has the abilities and also the interest – in conjunction with the Americans – to avenge the downing of the Turkish jet by the Syrians.

No new Syria

One of the products of CIA collection efforts is a problematic opinion about the

rebels. Firstly, says the spy agency, the number of rebels is smaller than what is perceived in the West. Secondly, the rebel leadership was massively infiltrated by radical Muslim Brotherhood elements. Some of the rebels have a radical agenda, both politically and religiously, which is incommensurate with what someone in the White House thinks.

Moreover, as the rebels are still not shying away from using cellular phones, CIA agents have been able to report that some of the massacres in Syria in the past year were carried out by elements that were not activated by the Assad regime.

And so, while the White House is trying to cultivate a group of states that would endorse the new Syria, CIA officials warn: Not only will there be no new, modern Syria, there is a chance it will be a very old Syria, similar to the current Egyptian model or to the Iraqi model, where nobody knows who controls what. The states who offer financial and military support to the rebels have no idea who they're supporting.

The US Administration had a vision for Syria. The Americans wanted the Baath

party to continue running the country. This party is indeed headed by an Alawite, but mostly comprises Sunnis. The Americans wanted to see a Sunni regime in Syria that has an alliance with Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Yet none of this vision materialized. What is left for the Americans is to continue reciting the mantra whereby Assad needs to be toppled because of his brutality, ties with Iran and so on.

For the Americans, the day after Assad can bring unpleasant realities and strategic difficulties. For Israel, the day after Assad is a critical matter. Muslim Brotherhood on the Egypt border, Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza, Muslim Brotherhood on the Syria border, Hezbollah on the Lebanon border – this is a nightmare that could materialize.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,734,0,L-4260723,00.html>

- **Israeli police deploy around Aqsa mosque**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Israeli authorities allowed women of various ages to enter Jerusalem during Ramadan, the chief

Palestinian liaison officer told Ma'an on Friday, but delays were widely reported.

Jihad Jayyousi was present at Bethlehem's checkpoint 300 at the northern entrance, where he told Ma'an that the Israeli side promised to let in women regardless of their age.

Children under the age of 12 are also being allowed into the city without permits.

But people waiting in line at the checkpoint said Israeli police were spread across every corner of Jerusalem checking IDs "many times a day" due to security restrictions.

Palestinians at the checkpoint said they would pray where they stood if Israel refused to let them in.

Israeli police insisted nothing had changed Friday.

"Worshippers from all over the West Bank will undergo the same regulations as last Friday, men above 40, women, and children are allowed to pray at the Al-Aqsa

mosque without permits," a police spokesman said.

In Jerusalem, crowds of worshipers arrived at the mosque from early morning.

Alleys were crowded on the second Friday of the holy month, especially at three of the gates leading toward the mosque. Worshipers arrived from Jerusalem and all over the West Bank.

The ministry of religious affairs installed a tent to shade worshipers during their arrival.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=507891>

- **Israeli court delays West Bank settlement eviction**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- Israel's Supreme Court on Friday granted a government request to delay the eviction of the largest illegal settler outpost in the occupied West Bank.

The court had previously ruled the outpost, Migron, was built on privately owned Palestinian land and had ordered

the government to remove it by Aug. 1. Friday's ruling extended the deadline to Aug. 21.

The government told the court on Sunday that the temporary site set up for Migron's 50 families to move to would not be ready in time.

The army also said it was concerned the eviction could set off violent protests by settlers in the sensitive period of Ramadan and asked to delay the task until after the Muslim holiday was over.

The UN deems all Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be illegal. Israel disputes this and distinguishes between about 120 settlements it has sanctioned and about 100 outposts erected by settlers without official authorization.

Migron settlers have long said they were encouraged by the state to erect the hilltop outpost. Though it never received official sanction, the government has spent at least 4 million shekels (\$1.1 million) on maintaining the cluster of mobile homes.

Israel cites biblical and historical ties to the West Bank, which it captured along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem in a 1967 war.

The Palestinians want to establish a state in those territories and say the settlements deny them a contiguous, viable state. About 311,000 Israeli settlers and 2.5 million Palestinians live in the West Bank.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=507934>

- **Israel 'attack plot' suspect to stand trial in Cyprus**

A forensic official takes pictures of a damaged Israeli embassy car after an explosion in New Delhi February 13, 2012.

NICOSIA (Reuters) -- A Swedish national of Lebanese descent arrested in Cyprus on suspicion of plotting to attack Israeli tourists in the country will stand trial on Sept. 12, authorities said on Friday.

The man, who has not been identified, faces nine charges of security-related

offenses related to tracking the movements and areas frequented by Israeli visitors to the holiday island. He was arrested on July 7 as a suspected security threat.

Israel has said the man was planning an attack similar to a suicide bus bombing in the Bulgarian city of Burgas on July 18 that killed seven people, five of them Israelis. Israel has blamed the attack on Lebanese Shiite Muslim militant group Hezbollah, and Iran, which has denied any involvement.

Cypriot authorities have acknowledged the suspect showed behavioral patterns similar to the incident in Burgas, in which the attacker waited for Israeli holidaymakers to board a bus at an airport before detonating a backpack of explosives.

During court hearings held behind closed doors, police have maintained the Cyprus suspect is a member of Hezbollah. The group is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States and other countries, but not by Cyprus.

The suspect was detained two days after his arrival to Cyprus via London, following a tip-off from British intelligence services. In his fourth court appearance since his detention, a district court in the southern coastal city of Limassol on Friday ruled the man would remain in custody until his trial in September, the semi-official Cyprus News Agency reported.

At that hearing, before a criminal court, he will be formally charged and enter a plea.

Israel is less than an hour by air away from Cyprus and thousands of Israelis visit each year. It is also a popular destination for couples getting married.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=507983>

- **Abbas 'holds talks with Islamic Jihad leader'**

An Islamic Jihad delegation will meet with Egypt's Intelligence chief on Thursday to discuss Palestinian reconciliation.

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- President Mahmoud Abbas held talks with Islamic Jihad Secretary-General Ramadan Shallah in a

phone call on Thursday, sources close to Islamic Jihad told Ma'an.

The leaders discussed Palestinian issues, the sources said.

Shallah, who is currently in Cairo, heads Islamic Jihad's delegation in reconciliation talks.

The Islamic Jihad leader also met with Gaza's Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday to discuss Palestinian affairs and relations with Egypt, officials said.

On Thursday, an Islamic Jihad delegation will meet with Egypt's Intelligence chief to discuss Palestinian reconciliation.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=507817>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Onslaught looms as Assad forces pound Aleppo outskirts**

President Bashar al-Assad's artillery pounded rebel-held areas around Aleppo on Friday, preparing the ground for an onslaught on Syria's biggest city where the

United States has said it fears a "massacre" may be imminent.

Opposition sources said the shelling, which follows intensive ground and air bombardment of the city itself, was an attempt to stop fighters from resupplying rebel units inside Aleppo.

"They are shelling at random to instill a state of terror," said Anwar Abu Ahed, a rebel commander outside the city.

The battle for Aleppo, a major power centre that is home to 2.5 million people, is being seen as a potentially game changing turning point in the 16-month uprising against Assad that could give one side an edge in a conflict where both the rebels and the government have struggled to gain the upper hand.

A rebel commander said insurgents had attacked a convoy of Syrian army tanks heading towards the city, as the government continued to redeploy forces from other parts of the country to bolster its forces there.

The fate of Syria itself — an ethnically fragmented nation of 22 million people —

is likely to determine the future of the wider region for years to come amid fears that its own sectarian tensions could spill across its porous borders.

The US State Department said credible reports of tank columns moving on Aleppo, along with air strikes by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, represented a serious escalation of Assad's efforts to crush his opponents.

"This is the concern: that we will see a massacre in Aleppo, and that's what the regime appears to be lining up for," Victoria Nuland, a spokeswoman for the State Department, said.

As the remaining residents of Aleppo braced themselves for more bloodshed, General Robert Mood, the outgoing head of the UN monitoring mission, told Reuters he thought Assad's days in power were numbered.

"In my opinion it is only a matter of time before a regime that is using such heavy military power and disproportional violence against the civilian population is going to fall," the Norwegian general, who left Damascus on 19 July, said.

Navay Pillay, the United Nations human rights chief, said a pattern had emerged as Assad's forces resorted to shelling, tank fire and door-to-door searches.

"All this, taken along with the reported build-up of forces in and around Aleppo, bodes ill for the people of that city," Pillay said in statement.

Mortar rounds

Government troops stationed on the outskirts of the city unleashed barrages of heavy-caliber mortar rounds on its western neighborhoods, while Russian-built MI-25 helicopter gunships struck in the east, opposition activists in the city said.

The heavy fighting follows an audacious bomb attack that killed four of Assad's closest lieutenants in Damascus on 18 July, a development that led some analysts to speculate that the government's grip was slipping.

In the first reported casualty on Friday, a man of about 60 wearing a traditional white prayer outfit was killed near a park

in Aleppo. His body was placed in a mosque pending identification.

On Thursday, 34 people were killed in and around Aleppo, according to opposition activists.

"The rebels have so far been nimble, and civilians have mostly been the victims of the bombardment," said activist Abu Mohammad al-Halabi, speaking by phone from the city.

Majed al-Nour, another activist, said rebels had attacked a security outpost in the neighborhood of Bustan al-Joz, which is close to Aleppo's city center, on Thursday.

"The rebels are present in the east and west of the city, and have a foothold in areas of the center. The regime forces control the entrances of Aleppo and the main thoroughfares and commercial streets and are bombarding the residential districts that fell into rebel hands," he said.

Nour said tens of thousands of people had fled Aleppo to nearby northern rural regions close to Turkey.

Helicopters over Damascus

In Damascus on Friday, four helicopters flew over southern areas of the capital, firing heavy machine guns into the districts of Hajar al-Aswad and Tadamon as well as the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp, a resident said.

"I can see two above me right now, heading towards Hajar al-Aswad," she said by telephone, the pounding of guns audible in the background. Helicopters were flying low and appeared to be targeting specific buildings.

With UN Security Council resolutions for sanctions against Syria vetoed by Russia and China for a third time last week, the United States has said it is stepping up assistance to Syria's fractured opposition, though it remains limited to non-lethal supplies such as communications gear and medical equipment.

Reuters has learned that the White House has crafted a presidential directive, called a "finding," that would authorize greater covert assistance for the rebels, while stopping short of arming them.

It is unclear whether President Barack Obama has signed the document, a highly classified authorization for covert activity.

A Syrian parliamentarian from the northern province of Aleppo said on Friday she had defected to Turkey, becoming the first member of the rubber-stamp assembly elected in May which is dominated by Assad's Baath Party to defect.

"I have crossed to Turkey and defected from this tyrannical regime," Ikhlas al-Badawi told Sky News Arabia.

One of the most senior figures to defect from Assad's inner circle, Brigadier General Manaf Tlas, has put himself forward as someone who could help unify the opposition inside and outside Syria to help steer a power transfer.

Tlas visited Saudi Arabia before going on to Turkey where he met Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Turkey, a former ally of Assad and now one of his fiercest critics, has a heavy strategic stake in shaping any post-Assad leadership.

Meanwhile, a source close to the mediation effort told Reuters on Friday that international mediator Kofi Annan was still trying to forge a political solution to the Syria crisis despite being made a scapegoat for the failure of the two sides to agree.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/onslaught-looms-assad-forces-pound-aleppo-outskirts>

- **Suspected smugglers exchange fire with Sinai border guards**

A number of suspected smugglers exchanged fire on Thursday evening with border guards in North Sinai, leading to no injuries on either side.

A security source in Sinai said that the security guards saw a group of what they believed were smugglers attempting to approach the international border to the south of the Rafah crossing. They chased the alleged smugglers and exchanged fire with them before the suspects escaped.

The same source added that police are currently searching for the perpetrators

and the concerned authorities were notified to investigate the incident.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/suspected-smugglers-exchange-fire-sinai-border-guards>

- **US defense chief to visit Egypt next week, meet Morsy**

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta will meet Egypt's new Islamist President Mohamed Morsy next week and hold talks with the country's top general during a trip to the Middle East and North Africa, the Pentagon said on Thursday.

Besides Egypt, Panetta will travel to Israel, Jordan and Tunisia next week, the Pentagon said without disclosing the dates of each visit.

Panetta's trip to Egypt comes on the heels of a mid-July visit there by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who also met Morsy and Egypt's top general, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi. Top on the agenda will be Egypt's turbulent democratic transition, which has seen the military wrestling for influence with the new president.

"The secretary is very much looking forward to meeting with senior Egyptian officials and to encourage them to continue the political transition that's taking place," said Pentagon spokesman George Little. "I wouldn't want to get too far ahead of the discussions, since they're taking place next week."

In Israel and Jordan, Panetta will "engage close allies who share our concerns about Syria and Iran," Little said.

The United States said on Thursday it appeared that forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad were "lining up" for a massacre in the city of Aleppo, but again ruled out military intervention in the conflict.

Clinton visited Israel on 16 July, saying the two countries were "on the same page" in their determination to prevent Iran from achieving what the West fears is its goal of building a nuclear bomb.

On Wednesday, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak called for major powers to speed up efforts to stop Iran's nuclear program, cautioning it would be tougher

to confront it once Tehran managed to cross an atomic threshold.

Israeli media interpreted Barak's comments as pushing for a possible Israeli strike against Iran, which denies pursuit of atomic weapons and says its nuclear program is peaceful.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/us-defense-chief-visit-egypt-next-week-meet-morsy>

- **Brotherhood organizes support campaign for Qandil**

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party continued its campaign to support President Mohamed Morsy's decisions by holding meetings across Egypt about the nomination of new Prime Minister Hesham Qandil.

Karim Radwan, the head of the group's office in south Cairo, said that the Brotherhood and the FJP held meetings with representatives of different movements to bolster support for Qandil and Morsy's 100-day program.

A member of the Muslim Brotherhood's shura council said that the party seeks to raise awareness about Morsy keeping his promise to choose a prime minister from outside the Brotherhood.

The group expected liberals and secularists to criticize the president as they reject anyone with an Islamist background, he said, adding that the Brotherhood trusts the average citizen to only care about the prime minister's performance, not his background.

The head of the Muslim Brotherhood's office in Beni Suef, Mohamed Abdallah, said the group held a meeting Wednesday after Qandil's nomination with 12 parties and political movements in Sharqiya to garner support for the president's choice.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-organizes-support-campaign-qandil>

- **Some state security documents escaped destruction, officials say**

Several high ranking state security officials did not follow former security chief Hassan Abdel Rahman order's to destroy

sensitive documents during the 25 January revolution, according to new documents recently acquired by Al-Masry Al-Youm.

Forty-five officials, including Abdel Rahman, are currently awaiting trial on these charges.

According to the documents, officers said they feared that destroying the documents was a crime that would be punishable by law. Some officials hid the files in Port Said port, while others built cement walls at the doors of rooms where the files are kept.

Essam Fouad, the former head of state security in Alexandria, said that he had received a letter from Abdel Rahman demanding that all files marked "top secret" be destroyed. Fouad instead ordered soldiers to build cement walls blocking the rooms where these files were kept.

In March 2011, following the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak, hundreds of civilians stormed the State Security Investigation Services (SSIS) facilities in Cairo and other governorates following reports that its officers had been

disposing of documents believed to provide evidence of its corrupt practices.

Some citizens had seized a number of documents and handed them over to investigators.

The SSIS, which had been Egypt's much-feared and most-hated security agency, was one tool used by Mubarak's regime to suppress political activism. The agency was accused of torturing political detainees.

Egypt's former Interior Minister Mansour al-Essawy disbanded the agency in March 2011.

The investigating judge decided to try 45 officials at the now defunct state security agency in the criminal court. The trial will begin in September.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/some-state-security-documents-escaped-destruction-officials-say>

- **Sources deny corruption case against Gamal Mubarak closed**

Judicial sources denied Thursday reports that corruption charges against former President Mubarak's son Gamal have been dropped or settled.

Reports had claimed that Gamal Mubarak had returned the LE3 million he allegedly received in illegal bonuses while he represented the Arab African International Bank on the board of the Central Bank in exchange for corruption charges not being filed against him.

The sources said that investigations in the case are ongoing, and that Mubarak's attorney submitted a request to drop the case in exchange for LE3 million, which the prosecution would not consider until the investigations have been completed.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sources-deny-corruption-case-against-gamal-mubarak-closed>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Gov't refutes reports of Jordanian-Syrian border clash, says Syrian army was shooting at refugees**

'Syrian child killed as Syrian army opens fire on refugees escaping to Jordan'

AMMAN/RAMTHA – Syrian forces opened fire on a group of refugees escaping to Jordan, injuring several, including a child who was pronounced dead on arrival at a hospital in Ramtha, government spokesman Samih Maaytah told the Jordan Times early Friday.

Maaitah refuted news reports that two Jordanian were injured in the incident, stressing that Syrian forces opened fire on the refugees crossing into the Kingdom.

“The Jordanian military did not respond, there were no clashes,” Maaytah told The Jordan Times.

Some news reports said Jordanian and Syrian forces exchanged gunfire in the border region early Friday morning.

But a source stationed in the border region said “minor” clashes broke out between the two sides near Syria’s Tal Shihab area, close to the Jordanian city of Ramtha, after Syrian forces opened fire on a group of 300 refugees attempting to flee into Jordan, accidentally targeting Jordanian servicemen.

Jordanian forces returned gunfire in kind, the source added, providing cover allowing for the refugees - the vast majority of whom women and children - to cross into the Kingdom.

According to the source, the incident sparked a fierce 15-minute battle in the border region, near the Jordanian village of Al Turra, during which no injuries were reported.

But Maaitah said the incident occurred on Syrian soil against the refugees and did not involve Jordanian forces.

Syria has imposed a months-long military blockade in the border region to prevent civilians from fleeing to Jordan, a campaign activists claim targets the relatives of armed servicemen, whose safety remains Damascus’s main leverage to prevent en masse defections.

Official sources and activists claim that the military crackdown has led to low-level coordination between Amman and opposition forces to ensure the safe passage of Syrian civilians, with the Free Syrian Army providing Jordan with “leads” on impending arrivals in order to mobilise

vehicles and emergency medical equipment.

Although hundreds of Syrians have been wounded in their attempts to enter Jordan - many of whom fatally – Syria’s military clampdown has failed to curb a refugee influx that according to the UN has topped 1,000 persons per day.

According to the security source, Damascus has nearly doubled its border forces over the last week, prompting concerns among Jordanian officials of a potential wide-scale confrontation.

“Each day seems to become more tense than the next - any wrong move and we can enter a real state of emergency,” the source told The Jordan Times.

Maaytah denied any rise in tensions between Amman and Damascus.

The issue of refugees has become a growing point of contention between Jordan and Syria, with Damascus objecting to Amman’s ongoing open-border policy of offering shelter to civilians and army defectors alike.

In light of an ongoing Syrian exodus into Jordan sparked by intensified clashes between regime and rebel forces, Jordan has accelerated efforts to open the country’s first Syrian refugee camp in the border city of Mafraq by early next week.

<http://jordantimes.com/govt-refutes-reports-of-jordanian-syrian-border-clash>

- **US defence secretary to visit Jordn**

WASHINGTON (AFP) - US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta heads to Tunisia and Egypt next week to support their "democratic transitions" and to Israel and Jordan to discuss the Syrian conflict, the Pentagon said.

Recent regime changes in Tunis and Cairo present "new opportunities for security cooperation," spokesman George Little told reporters on Thursday.

The Pentagon chief will stop first in Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring series of popular uprisings against longstanding autocratic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East.

Panetta is then scheduled to head to Egypt for meetings with new President Mohamed Morsi and Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, leader of the Egyptian military council. Panetta last visited Egypt -- a longtime US ally -- in October.

In Israel and Jordan, Panetta will "engage close allies who share our concerns about Syria and Iran," Little said.

Aside from the Egyptian leaders, the Pentagon did not specify who Panetta will be meeting, nor did it release an exact timeline for the trip.

Israel and Jordan share borders with Syria, where more than 19,000 people have died in 16 months of rebellion, according to Syrian activists.

Israel has tightened security along its armistice line with Syria and reinforced its troops in the Golan Heights.

Jordan has had an influx of Syrian refugees since the crisis began.

<http://jordantimes.com/us-defence-secretary-to-visit-jordn>

- **Beirut MPs call for protests against Bassil,**

Beirut MPs on Friday called for protests outside the residences of Energy Minister Gebran Bassil and Telecommunications Minister Nicolas Sehnaoui, who both represent the Free Patriotic Movement in the cabinet.

“[We should] punish [people] behind the power cuts and the water [supply] problems; therefore, we call for holding a protest outside the residence of the energy minister because the political party he belongs to has been [controlling] the ministry for four years and led us to the current electricity situation,” the National News Agency quoted Future bloc MP Michel Faraon as saying.

The MPs also called for a demonstration outside Sehnaoui’s residence “because he [made] the Telecommunications Ministry cover for the criminals by not submitting the telecom data to the security forces.”

Moreover, the Beirut parliamentarians called for protests outside the residences of Culture Minister Gaby Layoun and Defense Minister Fayeze Ghosn, “who reject cooperating with President Michel

Sleiman, who is preserving Lebanon’s sovereignty and dignity.”

MPs Mohammad Qabbani, Ghazi Yousse, Tamam Salam and Ammar Hourri all joined Faraon in the protest calls.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?!D=423032>

- **Future bloc MP: Lebanese army was not ordered to defend borders**

Future bloc MP Mohammad Kabbara said Friday that the Lebanese army was not ordered to defend Lebanon’s northern borders, but only to deploy there.

“Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s government [may have] ordered the army to protect the borders, or maybe not. [Instead, it] specified [the army’s] mission to deploy near the borders only [without protecting them],” Kabbara said in a statement.

He added that the government took the decision to send the army to the borders to protect Hezbollah.

“The government of the arms’ party, [Hezbollah], took the decision to dispatch the army near the borders to protect the Farsi party and not Lebanon and its people.”

Kabbara also said that Lebanon’s military institution was not protecting Lebanese northern border areas, targeted by Syrian regime forces’ gunfire, “because it was not ordered to defend [the borders] but only to deploy [in the region].”

Kabbara, who referred to Hezbollah “as the party of arms,” accused the group of participating in the crackdowns targeting Syrian people in Homs, Aleppo, Edleb and Damascus.

Hezbollah is mainly backed by Damascus and Tehran.

Kabbara also addressed the premier, saying: “Isn’t it time, prime minister, to raise your voice for the sake of Lebanon’s dignity and that of your city [Tripoli]?”

“Wake up prime minister before history records that you played a role in bringing the downfall of Lebanon.”

The Lebanese army began sending troop reinforcements to the Syrian border in July following several cross-border raids by Syrian forces into Lebanon.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=422992>

- **March 14 MP: Aoun against revealing assassination suspects**

March 14 MP Boutros Harb said in remarks published Friday that Change and Reform bloc leader MP Michel Aoun was against attempts to reveal any suspect involved in crimes aimed at figures affiliated with the March 14 alliance.

Harb told As-Seyassah newspaper that Aoun's stance against transferring the telecom data to the relevant security agencies "serves as [an attempt] to cover up for the criminals."

"This means that Aoun does not want any criminal involved in the crimes, that had targeted March 14 forces, to be revealed."

Harb also said that he possessed information on persistent attempts to

assassinate some Lebanese Opposition figures.

Furthermore, he reiterated his call for Hezbollah to request a wanted man, affiliated with it, to give his testimony regarding an assassination attempt against Harb.

The lawmaker also voiced hope that Hezbollah would not "put itself in the dock."

Last week, Harb accused one of the suspects in the assassination attempt against him of being a member of Hezbollah.

Harb escaped an assassination earlier this month. The attempt on his life followed a bid in April to murder Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea.

In light of the assassination attempts in Lebanon, the Western-backed March 14 alliance has been calling on the telecom ministry to hand over crucial telecom data to the security forces that would assist efforts made for uncovering the suspects.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=422923>

"Our message is that Assad must go," he said.

6. SYRIA

- **France says Assad preparing "slaughter" in Aleppo**

France on Friday said it feared Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was preparing to carry out a "slaughter" of his own people in the second city of Aleppo.

"With the build-up of heavy weapons around Aleppo, Assad is preparing to carry out a fresh slaughter of his own people," French Foreign Ministry spokesperson Bernard Valero told AFP, echoing similar concerns expressed by US officials.

The US State Department on Thursday warned that Assad may be preparing to carry out a massacre following "credible reports" that columns of tanks, helicopter gunships and warplanes were being readied for an assault on the city.

Valero said France shared US concerns over the rapidly deteriorating situation in Aleppo and called on Assad to end the violence and step down.

Aleppo, Syria's most populous city and also the country's commercial hub, has been the theatre of fierce fighting between the opposition and Assad's forces for the last week.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=423003>

- **Syria rebels brace for decisive battle in Aleppo**

ALEPPO, Syria: Rebel forces were bracing on Friday for a decisive "mother of all" battles in Aleppo, as Washington warned the Syrian army could be preparing to carry out a massacre in the country's second city.

The Syrian army has been sending waves of reinforcements towards the northern city, and a security source told AFP the offensive feared by the rebels could come as early as Friday.

"The special forces were deployed on Wednesday and Thursday on the edges of the city, and more troops have arrived to

take part in a generalised counter-offensive on Friday or Saturday," the security source said of Aleppo.

Fighting raged in Aleppo on Thursday as clashes also shook parts of Damascus and other areas, with at least 121 people reported killed -- 64 civilians, 32 regime troops and 25 rebels.

Rebels fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad's regime also brought in reinforcements, with the source estimating that between 1,500 and 2,000 opposition fighters had arrived from outside Syria's most populous city to reinforce some 2,000 already fighting inside Aleppo.

"They are mainly present in the southern and eastern suburbs of the city, mainly Salaheddin and nearby districts," he said.

The airport was cut off from the city, as four of the five roads leading to it were under rebel control, he added.

Rebels also said a regime assault appeared imminent.

"The army's reinforcements have arrived in Aleppo," Colonel Abdel Jabbar al-Okaidi, a spokesman for the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA), told AFP via Skype.

"We expect a major offensive at any time, specifically on areas across the southern belt, from east to west."

Okaidi added that some 100 tanks and a large number of military vehicles had arrived in the country's commercial hub.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that regime forces pounded the Salaheddin neighbourhood in the south and Jazamati in the east.

On July 20, the rebels launched an all-out assault to overrun Aleppo, a move analysts say is aimed at establishing a bastion close to the rebel military headquarters in neighbouring Turkey.

The newspaper Al-Watan, which is close to the regime, led on Thursday with the headline "Aleppo, the mother of all battles," adding that "the army continues to chase terrorists in the outskirts of Damascus and the province".

Citing an Arab diplomatic source, it added: "Aleppo will be the last battle waged by the Syrian army to crush the terrorists and after that Syria will emerge from the crisis."

Washington warned that the Syrian regime may be preparing to carry out a massacre in the city.

"This is the concern, that we will see a massacre in Aleppo, and that's what the regime appears to be lining up for," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland.

"Our hearts are with the people of Aleppo. And again, this is another desperate attempt by a regime that is going down to try to maintain control, and we are greatly concerned about what they are capable of in Aleppo."

But she stuck to the US position of only providing non-lethal assistance to the opposition rebels who have been fighting for 16 months to topple Assad.

"We do not believe that pouring more fuel on this fire is going to save lives. We are working in non-lethal ways. We are

working to support the Syrian opposition," the spokeswoman told journalists.

As UN heritage agency UNESCO called for forces fighting in Syria to avoid damaging cultural sites, in particular in world heritage site Aleppo, UN chief peacekeeper Herve Ladsous said there was "no plan B".

"There is one political process for the time being, that is the six-point plan of the joint special envoy Kofi Annan," he told reporters in Damascus.

"And as you know, and has been said time and again, there is no plan B. There is no alternative to that."

Annan's plan called for an inclusive political process, a ceasefire, humanitarian aid, release of detainees, freedom of movement for journalists and peaceful demonstrations to be allowed.

"Syrians killing Syrians is something that should not continue," Ladsous added.

Clashes also erupted in and around southern Damascus, with five children among 16 people killed when a village

outside the capital was shelled while fighting rocked the Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp, the Observatory and witnesses said.

Regime helicopters also strafed targets in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad neighbourhood, activists and residents said.

"Last night was quiet but people woke up to the sound of explosions and shelling from seven o'clock in the morning," an activist calling himself Abu Qais al-Shami told AFP.

After a week of heavy clashes, activists say regime forces have largely regained control of Damascus, with just a few pockets of resistance remaining.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said on Thursday that Assad's regime was bound to fall.

"I'm confident that sooner or later, Bashar will fall," he said at a Warsaw news conference, describing the actions of the regime as "abominable behaviour".

Meanwhile, Israel on Thursday boosted security along its ceasefire line with Syria

in the occupied Golan Heights, an Israeli source said on condition of anonymity.

Syria's foreign ministry confirmed the defection of three diplomats, but downplayed their importance and indirectly accused Qatar -- where they reportedly fled -- of encouraging "national division".

It named them as Lamia Hariri, charge d'affaires in Cyprus, her husband Abdel Latif al-Dabbagh, ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, and Mohammed Tahsin al-Fakir, security attache in Oman.

A European Commission aid expert said on Thursday the humanitarian situation in Syria had taken a dramatic turn for the worse.

"It's like running behind a train that constantly keeps accelerating," said the official, adding that more funds were needed to assist refugees fleeing to neighbouring Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Tens of thousands of people have fled Syria to escape the violence which the

Observatory says has killed more than 19,000 people since mid-March 2011.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/international-news/1781-syria-rebels-brace-for-decisive-battle-in-aleppo>

- **Syrian troops defuse 8 bombs in Damascus, clash with rebels**

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Syrian security forces have defused eight bombs in the capital's Hajar al-Aswad district as armed groups fighting against the government continue their deadly attacks.

There are also reports of clashes between government forces and terrorists in Damascus suburbs, the northern city of Aleppo, Dara'a in the south and the eastern city of Dayr al-Zawr.

A number of terrorists were killed during clashes in Dayr al-Zawr and at least five vehicles equipped with machineguns were destroyed in the outskirts of Aleppo.

Meanwhile, Press TV correspondent in Syria has said that armed men posing as Syrian soldiers are killing civilians in

Aleppo in a bid to tarnish the image of the country's security forces and increase the outside pressure on Damascus government.

Armed men in army uniforms have so far killed many civilians in Aleppo's Salah al-Din neighborhood, our correspondent added.

Syria has been the scene of deadly unrest since mid-March, 2011 and many people, including large numbers of army and security personnel, have been killed in the violence.

Last week, four top Syrian military and security officials were killed in a terrorist bombing at the headquarters of the National Security in the capital.

The West and the Syrian opposition accuse the government of killing protesters. But Damascus blames "outlaws, saboteurs and armed terrorist groups" for the unrest, insisting that it is being orchestrated from abroad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/27/253037/syrian-forces-defuse-8-bombs-in-capital/>

- **No plan B for Syrian unrest beyond Annan plan: UNSMIS head**

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Herve Ladsous (L) and Gen. Babacar Gaye (R), the new head of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria who replaces Maj. Gen. Robert Mood, give a press conference at the in Damascus on July

We will try our best to contribute towards finding the solutions, but that of course the solutions, especially the political solution, must exist in the framework, in a process that will be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led."

Herve Ladsous, the head of UN peacekeeping operations

The head of UN peacekeeping operations has said that there is no alternative to Kofi Annan's peace plan to end months of unrest in Syria.

Urging a Syrian-led political process to end the country's unrest, Herve Ladsous said on Thursday that the only way to start the political process is to stick to the Annan's

plan and that there was "no plan B" beyond Annan's plan.

"We will try our best to contribute towards finding the solutions, but that of course the solutions, especially the political solution, must exist in the framework, in a process that will be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led," Ladsous said during talks with Syrian officials in Damascus.

He also urged all Syrian parties to implement Annan's plan to stop the deadly violence.

He also defended the decision to reduce the number of UN observers in Syria, saying that "we found ourselves with too many people and not enough to do".

Half of the 300 UN military observers deployed in Syria to oversee Annan's peace plan left the country after the Security Council on July 20 extended the mission's mandate for another month.

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<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/27/253043/no-plan-b-for-syria-beyond-annan-plan/>

- **Former UN mission chief: Assad's fall only a matter of time**

Kofi Annan and UN Sec.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon meet in London to discuss future of mediation efforts; ICRC evacuating some aid workers due to deteriorating security on the ground. PHOTO: REUTERS/KHALED AL- HARIRI

OSLO - It is just a matter of time before the government of Syrian President

Bashar Assad falls because its use of massive force is mobilizing insurgents, General Robert Mood, the former head of the UN monitoring mission in Syria, said on Friday.

"In my opinion it is only a matter of time before a regime that is using such heavy military power and disproportional violence against the civilian population is going to fall," the Norwegian general, who left Damascus on July 19, told Reuters.

"Every time there are 15 people killed in a village, 500 additional sympathizers are mobilized, roughly 100 of whom are fighters," Mood said.

However, the authoritarian Syrian leader is probably secure in the short term because he has the military capability to hold off the rebels and his eventual fall could be months or even years away, Mood said.

"In the short term it may very well be possible for him to (hold on), because the military capabilities of the Syrian army are much much stronger than those of the opposition," Mood said.

"The minute you see larger military formations leaving the ranks of the government to join the opposition, then that is when it starts accelerating ... This could last for months or even years," he said.

Mood left Syria after his 90-day mission expired - the mandate was renewed on July 20 for 30 days - and has been replaced by Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye, who has already taken up his post in Damascus.

Mood, who commanded a 400-strong mission, was unable to stop the escalating violence and said organized groups with artillery, mortars and mechanized formations were responsible for some of the violence in Syrian villages.

Meanwhile, International mediator Kofi Annan is still trying to forge a political solution to the Syria crisis despite being made a scapegoat for the failure of the two sides to agree, a source close to the mediation effort said on Friday.

Annan and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon were meeting in London on Friday to discuss the future of mediation efforts

and the UN observer mission, and the Syria "Action Group" may meet again soon, but not at ministerial level, the source said.

The source described the latest veto of a UN Security Council resolution on Syria as "a trainwreck", but said it was encouraging to see opposition figures coming together, although they needed to "hurry up" to form a cohesive group.

On the ground in Syria, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is evacuating some expatriate aid workers due to the deteriorating security situation, moving them temporarily to Beirut, a spokesman said on Friday.

"An unstable and deteriorating situation in several parts of the country has led the ICRC to temporarily relocate some of its staff outside of Syria," ICRC spokesman Hicham Hassan told Reuters in Geneva. "A core team of expatriates and nationals will continue working in Damascus."

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent has suspended some of its aid operations in the city of Aleppo, mainly the deployment

of ambulances and first aid work by volunteers, he added.

<http://www.jpost.com/ArtsAndCulture/Arts/Article.aspx?id=279146>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Dubai police chief warns Muslim Brotherhood over social media use**

Top officer tells organisation's members not to abuse social media in order to destabilise region

Dubai: Dubai's Police Chief has lambasted the Muslim Brotherhood and warned them against abusing social media to destabilise the GCC region or overthrow any of its governments or rulers.

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood, if butting heads with any of the Gulf states or the GCC as a whole, would face what Lt General Dahi Khalfan Tamim described on Wednesday as the 'Gulf Rock Head' hinting at a ferocious-kind of determination and resistance.

“

We love our leaders and rulers because they came from within our families and ancestors. Gulf nationals are known for

their loyalty, fidelity and support. While using Twitter I've discovered that there are many tweeters, who aim to dethrone some rulers or governments in the Gulf

“They will eventually fall into a whirlpool that they would not be able to face. The Gulf is a red line, it's a red line not only to Iran, but also to the Muslim Brotherhood. “We love our leaders and rulers because they came from within our families and ancestors. Gulf nationals are known for their loyalty, fidelity and support.

“While using Twitter I've discovered that there are many tweeters, who aim to dethrone some rulers or governments in the Gulf,” said Lt General Dahi during a Ramadan majlis organised by Dubai Press Club (DPC).

Sami Al Riyami, Editor-in-Chief of Emarat Al Youm, moderated the 90-minute session that was held at Shaikh Maktoum Hall at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

The session was titled 'Leaders of Social Networking; Vulnerability and Impact'.

Sharing his experience with a hall packed with reporters and experts, Lt General

Dahi said ‘wise men and youth’ have been using Twitter since it was introduced to the Arab world.

“I have a different viewpoint about Twitter. Too many officials, friends and relatives advised me to stop using Twitter but I kept using it to see from where those curses and insults [against Gulf states] were coming.

“I wanted to discover where that hatred came from. Many tweeters apologised for cursing and/or offending me on Twitter. But Dahi Khalfan remained Dahi... I did not impersonate any other bogus personality like others who create bogus accounts so they could keep their identities discrete while abusing Twitter and cursing and insulting others,” said the Dubai Police Chief.

As a prominent leader in the UAE and an active Twitter user, the session shed light on the importance of communicating with the community through interactive social media platforms.

By the time the floor was opened for questions, the session’s main highlight was diverted into political and security

matters. Lt General Dahi criticised how some tweeters indulge in discussions and arguments on Twitter “just to curse and offend others.”

‘Grow up’

He said offenders on Twitter only curse and insult others because they’ve always lived in a suppressive community and constantly suffered the oppression imposed by the regimes ruling their countries.

“I am not quitting Twitter, I will continue using my account and reply to offending tweets in a peaceful and courteous way. After five years, I assure you that things will change.

“Twitter users will eventually grow up and maybe, become wiser. What do you expect from a tweeter who has been suppressed in his country! This is why they abuse Twitter.

“They use bogus identities and curse or offend others to let out that oppression inside of them. I strongly urge UAE tweeters not to follow the same pattern,

or fall victim to that category,” said Lt General Dahi.

Highlighting a very major fact, Dubai Police Chief stressed that a tweet is not a press statement.

“It is not permissible to take a tweet and use it as a press statement because it’s only a tweet and nothing else... it’s a discussion between tweeters. I don’t want each tweet to be taken or deemed as a press statement because a tweet represents a personal opinion,” he said.

On why he started discussing politics on his personal Twitter account, Lt General Dahi said: “Who said I [Dahi Khalfan] represent a shaikh or Dubai government or the UAE.

“When I tweet, I represent Dahi Khalfan. Twitter is a social means to communicate with others. I only spoke politics when my country was being offended and subjected to insults by tweeters. The attacks against the UAE on Twitter were organised and orchestrated... and that’s when I personally stepped in to defend my country and government.”

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/generaldubai-police-chief-warns-muslim-brotherhood-over-social-media-use-1.1053883>

- **Bahrain’s Prince Salman urges consultation**

Mutual respect, compassion are key factors for sectarianism-free societies

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Manama: Addressing a gathering of people at a majlis, Bahrain’s Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa urged citizens to base their decisions on consultations with each other rather than those imposed from others.

“No-one should make decisions single-mindedly without consulting with the citizens either through traditional gatherings or through existing constitutional institutions,” Prince Salman said. “Social communication and interaction in Bahrain have repeatedly proven their worth and we do encourage

people to consolidate regular communication with our brothers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries that represent Bahrain's strategic depth," he told a gathering of people at a majlis.

Prince Salman has been visiting majlis in different parts of the country since the start of Ramadan to discuss social, political and economic issues with people who attended them.

Ramadan majlis hold a special significance in Bahrain and are attended by members of the public, politicians, lawmakers, officials, diplomats, the media and social and professional components.

"Sectarianism, elitism and racism, under all their forms, are harmful while mutual respect and compassion between all the segments of the society make coexistence possible. We oppose all forms of single-mindedness and lack of communication and encourage meetings and dialogues between all people in order to reach agreements on all issues," he said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-s-prince-salman-urges-consultation-1.1053751>

- **Social dimension crucial for reconciliation in Bahrain, academic says**

Bahrainis say that patriotic moves needed to help overcome social, political crisis

Manama: The social dimension is a crucial factor in helping with political and national reconciliation, a Bahraini thinker has said.

Bahrainis have used the evening gatherings in Ramadan to address ways to help push national reconciliation and heal the worst social and political wounds in their modern history.

Debates have shown that while some groups insist on the political dimension as the way forward towards national reconciliation, others say that the social factor is more important within the Bahraini context.

"The social dimension is very important because it could lead to mutual acceptance," academic Baqer Al Najar has said.

"Once social acceptance is achieved, the political concurrence will follow. The

problem is that the events witnessed by Bahrain have caused an almost full rejection of the others, and this means that the social aspect should become the focus of attention and efforts,” Al Najar, a University of Bahrain sociology professor and author of several books, told a Ramadan gathering.

Other countries where people were divided over critical issues used mainly the social aspect to help with their national reconciliations, he said.

“The Irish experience, cited as one of the most successful national reconciliations, is a good example of the significance of the social factor,” he said.

However, Al Najar said that the political aspect should not be undervalued and must remain the factor that will consecrate and reinforce national reconciliation.

“There is a need to achieve a common denominator of solutions that will bolster progress towards reconciliation.”

Al Najar said that he fully supported calls issued by several Bahrainis to use the

month of Ramadan to overcome differences, often on sectarian lines, on the events in the country.

‘Good opportunity’

“There is no doubt that Ramadan has a special significance for all people and that it has highly important social and spiritual features. Such moral aspects should be used in a positive way to boost mutual acceptance, openness and reconciliation.”

“There is an usually high level of communication between people across the social and political spectrum and this could be used as a prelude to political reconciliation. The gatherings are a good opportunity to lessen tension and move forward,” he said.

Salah Al Jowdar, a religious figure, said that national reconciliation could be achieved by religious figures and peace-loving Bahrainis.

“We live in a religiously committed society, which gives religious figures a special significance and their words are often heeded, so their responsibility is to use the month of Ramadan to push for

mutual acceptance and compassion,” he said.

Bahrainis keen on a peaceful society should move into genuine action for the sake of the nation, he said.

“They should work on promoting a culture of national unity through practical programmes. They should at the same time urge people to shun violence and avoid confrontations,” he said. “The biggest loser of what has happened in Bahrain is the simple citizen. We do need to have a strong voice of reason as the continuation of the crisis will deepen the social wounds and compound economic losses that will badly impact people’s lives,” he said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/social-dimension-crucial-for-reconciliation-in-bahrain-academic-says-1.1053745>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• **Balochistan Crisis: SC seeks joint statement from all respondents**

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought joint statement from

all respondents of the Balochistan target killing case on Thursday (today).

A three-member bench, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Iftikhar Chaudhry, again ordered the federal and provincial governments and the Frontiers Corps (FC) to submit their replies with signature of high-ups as it would decide the case in view of their statements. The court also ordered the Balochistan inspector general to furnish detail of each case of missing persons.

During the hearing, all respondents could not submit their replies in pursuance of the court's previous order. Upon this, the court ordered them to submit replies on Thursday (today). Justice Jawwad S Khawaja suggested that if local body elections are held, the situation could be stable.

Supreme Court Bar Association President Yasin Azad told the court that the bar had organised all-parties' conference regarding the Balochistan issue on May 26, adding that he had also sent the declaration's copy to the National Assembly speaker, but she did not

respond. The hearing of the case was adjourned until Thursday

<http://paktribune.com/news/Balochistan-Crisis-SC-seeks-joint-statement-from-all-respondents-251821.html>

- **Parliamentary proceedings cannot be challenged, says Justice Khawaja**

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Thursday heard petitions against the recently passed contempt of court law, DawnNews reported.

A five-judge bench of the apex court, headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and including Justice Shakirullah Jan, Justice Khilji Arif Hussain, Justice Jawad S Khawaja and Justice Tassadduq Hussain Jilani, heard 27 identical petitions challenging the Contempt of Court Act, 2012.

Petitioner Ahsanuddin Sheikh who is also president of the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) of Rawalpindi was presenting his arguments before the bench.

Sheikh said the parliament had passed the new contempt of court law in a rush and that it did not have the authority to curtail the judiciary's freedom.

Sheikh also read out the record of the parliamentary debate over the law before the bench.

In his remarks, Justice Khawaja said that the bench could review the debate held in the parliament.

He moreover said that parliamentary proceedings could not be challenged in any court of law and that they enjoyed protection under Article 69 of the Constitution.

However, he inquired regarding the rationale behind the drafting of the law, adding that the parliamentary debate was revealing with respect to the new law's legislation.

The bench later adjourned the hearing until tomorrow (Friday).

Earlier during Wednesday's hearing, dropping a hint that the controversial contempt of court act would not be struck

down in toto, the Supreme Court observed that the opposition should have resisted the passage of the law in the parliament instead of walking out of the house. The opposition should have stayed in the parliament to resist the ruling party's move, said Chief Justice Iftikhar.

Justice Khilji Arif Hussain described walkouts as an injustice with the electorate.

Only two clauses of the new law – one pertaining to immunity for holders of public office against contempt of court proceedings and the other about an automatic stay on the filing of an appeal – appeared to be areas of concern for the court and during the proceedings judges spoke about their respect for the parliament.

Legal experts are of the opinion that the two controversial clauses may be sent back by the court to the parliament for review.

Justice Jawwad S. Khawaja was the only judge who rejected the theory of parliament's supremacy and recalled that

the court had struck down statutes in the past as well.

The law

The contempt of court law had been hurriedly passed by the ruling government in a bid to protect the incumbent prime minister from facing the same fate as his predecessor.

The law exempts "holders of public office" from the mischief of contempt in "exercise of powers and performance of functions" and allows for suspension of a sentence during the pendency of an appeal.

The main opposition party in the National Assembly, the PML-N, had objected to the passage of the law saying it was not sent to relevant standing committees for deliberation.

The petitions

In all there are 27 petitions against the act and one of the petitioners, Baz Muhammad Kakar, contends that Section 3(i) of the new act curtailed the power and jurisdiction of the court under Article 204(2) of the Constitution to punish 'any

person' who abused, interfered with or obstructed the process of the court in any way or disobeyed any order of the court.

It also violated Article 25 which guaranteed equal protection of the laws, he said.

A petition filed on behalf of the Save Judiciary Movement by Advocate Hashmat Habib pleads that the law should be struck down because it goes against the Quran and Sunnah and the Contempt of Court Ordinance of 2003 be restored.

<http://dawn.com/2012/07/26/contempt-of-court-law-sc-resumes-hearing/>

- **Pakistan suspends Nato supply route over security**

PESHAWAR: Pakistan has temporarily stopped Nato supply trucks crossing its northwestern border into Afghanistan over security concerns due to fears of attacks, officials said Thursday.

Gunmen on Tuesday attacked a convoy of Nato supply trucks, killing a driver, in the town of Jamrud near the main northwestern city of Peshawar, in the first

such attack since Pakistan lifted a seven-month blockade of the border.

“Movement of Nato vehicles has been temporarily suspended since Wednesday evening to beef up security,” a paramilitary official told AFP.

“We have launched a search operation in the hills surrounding Jamrud,” the official added.

On Wednesday officials at the northwestern Torkham crossing had said traffic was picking up for the first time since the blockade ended, with more than 100 vehicles crossing in recent days.

Local administration official Bakhtiar Khan confirmed Thursday the supply route had been suspended due to “security reasons”.

“Intelligence officials have informed the authority that attacks may occur on Nato vehicles this week and in the light of this a security plan is being chalked out,” Khan told AFP.

He said the Nato route would “resume very soon”, but that until then trucks

carrying supplies for the 130,000-strong US-led mission in Afghanistan had been told not to approach the border.

“We have been told by authorities to wait here as they are building up security after the firing incident,” Amanullah Khan, a Nato truck driver, told AFP in Peshawar.

So far, the closure has only affected the Torkham crossing.

At the southwestern crossing of Chaman, some 17 trucks were awaiting clearance to enter Afghanistan and 20 other trucks were parked in Quetta, clearing agent Ashraf Khan told AFP.

Islamabad closed its land routes to Nato convoys after US air strikes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers on November 26, but reopened them after Washington said sorry for the deaths.

Before the blockade, around 150 trucks crossed into Afghanistan each day at Torkham — the closest border crossing to Kabul — and officials say the flow will rise to up to 300 a day.

<http://dawn.com/2012/07/26/pakistan-suspends-nato-supply-route-over-security/>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanrıverdi O and Selen Tonkuş. 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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