



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dışı Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

01 AUGUST 2012

NO: 1433

1. IRAQ.....	3
• Barzani ready to go to Iraqi Council of Representatives	3
• Iranian interior minister arrives in Baghdad	3
• The KBC must do something about statements that target the region, says MP	4
• Supreme Council: SLC call to question Barzani is a political targeting (Shafaq News).....	4
• Jobouri: Federal Parliament cannot investigate Barzani (alliraqnews).....	5
• It's not clear when we'll meet again for oil and gas law, says parliamentary committee (AKnews).....	6
• Muhamadi calls political blocs to avoid involving military forces in political disputes (alliraqnews).....	6
• Iran invites Iraqi president to upcoming NAM summit (Press TV).....	7
• The Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) must do something about statements that target the region, says MP (AKnews)	7
• HR Committee describes displaced Syrians as "political refugees" (alliraqnews)	8
• Turkish sources: Uglo submit six points of discussion for Erbil (Shafaq News).....	9
• Iraqi Gov't places French Total on blacklist (KUNA)	10
• Audit gives poor marks to Iraq (UPI)	10
2. IRAN	11
• Iranian VP to Visit Cairo	11
• Envoy: Iran to Withdraw Complaint if Receives S-300 from Russia	12
• Commander Confident about Enemies' Failure in Economic War on Iran.....	13
• Iran's Customs Office Issues Permission for Private Sector Oil Exports.....	14
• Iran oil embargo intended to cripple Asian economies: Mehmanparast	15
• Iran, Oman to launch direct flights.....	16
• Annan plan is the only solution to Syria crisis, Tehran insists.....	17
• Pakistan's Senate chairman to travel to Tehran	18
• No need for emergency OPEC meeting, oil price is fair: Iran	18
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	19
• Panetta prepared to use 'other options' to stop Iran	19
• Disabled IDF veteran who self-immolated dies.....	21
• Fischer: 'Things do not look good' for economy	22
• Mofaz: PM tries to deflect criticism with Iran talk	23
• PA, Israel agree on revenue revamp	25
• Egypt denies Mursi letter sent to Israel's Peres	26
• Newspapers Review: Palestinian-Israeli Meeting on Economy Dominates Daily	28
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	29
• Darfur price protest turns bloody	29
• Cairo: Morsi sent no letter to Peres	32
• Military intelligence department in east Libya bombed	33
• Ennahda reaches out to Tunisians' money to compensate its former political prisoners.....	34



• Sectarian clashes flare in Egypt, injuries reported	35
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	36
• Mikati's cabinet to provide reinforcements for army	36
• President Suleiman calls for defense strategy focused on army	36
• Four injured in Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp.....	37
6. SYRIA.....	37
• First clashes near Christian areas of Damascus, says NGO	37
• Syrian rebels say intelligence branches next Aleppo target.....	39
• Key military targets attacked: Rebels insist Aleppo is their Syria's Benghazi	40
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	43
• "Al-Qaeda" attack kills three in South Yemen.....	43
• Amnesty urges UAE to release or try activists	43
• Saleh loyalists wreak havoc in Yemen: Interior ministry attacked.....	44
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	46
• One dead, four hurt in mine blast in Afghanistan.....	46
• NATO troops' death toll up in Afghanistan in July	47
• Pakistan, U.S. sign agreement on NATO supply routes.....	49
• US-backed Afghan militiamen joining Taliban.....	49
• Afghans Hopeful, But Worried About Future.....	51

1. IRAQ

- **Barzani ready to go to Iraqi Council of Representatives**

ERBIL, July 31 (AKnews)- Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani said he is ready to go to the Iraqi Council of Representatives if the MPs decide to host him, Kurdish Xendan news agency reported.



Sarok BarzaniThe president issued a statement today saying there are reports that some Iraqi MPs are preparing to host him in the Council.

"I have a high respect for this Council which represents the entire Iraqi people... and I'm proud that with our share of power we participated in creating such a situation where Iraq today enjoys such a Council.

"Therefore, whenever this Council intends to host me, I'm ready to appear in front of it and speak the whole truth."

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/319593/>

- **Iranian interior minister arrives in Baghdad**

ERBIL, July 31 (AKnews)- Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammed Najjar, arrived today in Baghdad at an official visit, Ministry's website said.

Najjar is leading a delegation of his ministry for a three-day visit to Baghdad where he is due to meet with senior Iraqi official to discuss common files.

The delegation is to meet with the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to deliver an official invitation from his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahamdinejad, for participation in the non-aligned countries conference in Tehran which is due soon.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/319577/>

- **The KBC must do something about statements that target the region, says MP**

ERBIL, July 31 (AKnews) - An MP from Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) said Tuesday that the coalition must have a more active role through the media to put an end to the statements that target Kurds and the Kurdistan region.

The National Alliance (NA) has accused the Kurdistan Region of training armed elements from the Syrian Kurds to carry out armed attacks in Syria, within a series of statements that target the region and the Kurds.

MP Mahma Khalil said: "The allegations that the Kurdistan Region is training armed elements to carry out armed attacks in Syrian cities are unfounded and baseless.

"The region, depending on humanitarian basis, is supporting the Syrian people and host the fleeing people from the tragic situation, killings and destruction taking place in the Syrian cities.

"Everyone knows who defends the human rights and the rights of the Syrian people,

and therefore we say that the Kurds cannot be accused with such charges."

MP Ali Shabbar from the Muatin bloc of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) said that the Kurdistan Region's training of insurgents and sending them to Syria is "dangerous", describing it as an interference in the affairs of neighboring countries, saying that the position of the region is likely to be a reflection of the conflict with the federal government.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/319569/>

- **Supreme Council: SLC call to question Barzani is a political targeting (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, July 31 / Citizen parliamentary bloc that represents the Iraqi Islamic Supreme Council considered on Tuesday, State of law coalition (SLC) claim to host Kurdistan Region President , Massoud Barzani in the parliament as a "political targeting," asserting that it is not possible to implement this measure because Barzani is not an official in the federal government.

The MP , Aziz al-Ugaili said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "the claim of the members of the SLC to host , Massoud Barzani is a political targeting and who demands for it knows exactly the result, but all they do is just for media consuming."

"The interrogation process is essentially incorrect; because Barzani is not a legislative or executive official, not even a minister in the federal government," he added.

Some of the media had reported that SLC began a campaign to collect signatures that require calling the President of the Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barzani in parliament for questioning.

Media noted that the interrogation would be "on four issues, namely, prevention the spread of the Iraqi army near the border with Syria, Exxon Mobil contracts, oil smuggling and control of the border crossing points."

It is noted that the relationship with Iraqi Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki and his coalition with the Kurds is tense since the formation of the government under the

initiative of Barzani two years ago, Kurds along with al-Iraqiya coalition accuses Maliki of his uniqueness in decisions and dictatorship.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3134-supreme-council-slc-call-to-question-barzani-is-a-political-targeting-.html>

- **Jobouri: Federal Parliament cannot investigate Barzani (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, July 31 (AIN) –MP, Salim al-Jobouri, pointed out that "The Parliament can not investigate any Minister within the Kurdistan Regional Government which covers the President of KRG, Masoud Barzani."

He stated to AIN "Iraqi enjoys a federal regime which means that the federal parliament is concerned with the issues of the Federal Government only," noting that "There is no law that permits investigating Barzani and this investigation does not go in harmony with the political system and the structure of the State."

"Kurdistan Region has its parliament so Barzani is responsible towards this parliament only," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15457:jobouri-federal-parliament-can-not-investigate-barzani-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **It's not clear when we'll meet again for oil and gas law, says parliamentary committee (AKnews)**

ERBIL, July 31 (AKnews) – A member of Iraq's parliamentary oil and gas committee announced that members do not know when the committee and legal committee will meet to choose one of the three draft oil and gas laws sent to parliament.

Farhad Atrushi said: "There was a suggestion for the oil and gas and legal committees to hold a meeting on Wednesday to choose one of the three oil and gas drafts but the meeting was postponed and we don't know when we will meet to start a discussion about the draft.

"There is nothing new about the oil draft. If we hold a meeting it doesn't mean that we are going to approve it. The draft law discussion will take more than a meeting."

There was a suggestion for the oil and gas committee to meet Iraq's Oil Minister Abdul Karim Luabi. The meeting was canceled because of the minister's busy schedule.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/2/31/9494/>

- **Muhamadi calls political blocs to avoid involving military forces in political disputes (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, July 31 (AIN) –MP Walid al-Muhamadi of the Wasat Alliance stressed the necessity of having a high harmony between the Iraqi army and the Peshmerga elements before conducting any security operations.

In a press statement received by AIN on Tuesday, he said "Sending the military forces must be based on wise decision rather than tensions between Baghdad and Kurdistan Region," pointing out "There are many political problems and we cannot increase them where all have to be flexible in dealing with sending the Iraqi forces to Syria."

"The political and democratic process in Iraq is still in its early stages where all

must be wise to avoid the tensions between the two sides," he added.

"The Peshmerga elements are part of the Iraqi army and they protect the borders of KR a long time ago where the areas that they are protecting are stable and safe," he pointed out.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15412:muhamma

- **Iran invites Iraqi president to upcoming NAM summit (Press TV)**

Jul 31, 2012

Iran has invited Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to take part in the forthcoming Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Tehran.

Iran's Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar left for Baghdad on Tuesday to extend Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's invitation to his Iraqi counterpart to attend the NAM summit.

During his three-day visit, Mohammad-Najjar will also hold talks with senior Iraqi

authorities and discuss issues of mutual interest.

Iran will host the 16th summit of the NAM member states on August 26-31. The Islamic Republic will assume the rotating presidency of the movement for three years during the Tehran summit.

NAM, an international organization with 120 member states and 21 observer countries, is considered as not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/31/253697/iran-invites-iraqi-pres-to-nam-summit/>

- **The Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) must do something about statements that target the region, says MP (AKnews)**

ERBIL, July 31 (AKnews) - An MP from Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) said Tuesday that the coalition must have a more active role through the media to put an end to the statements that target Kurds and the Kurdistan region.

The National Alliance (NA) has accused the Kurdistan Region of training armed elements from the Syrian Kurds to carry out armed attacks in Syria, within a series of statements that target the region and the Kurds.

MP Mahma Khalil said: "The allegations that the Kurdistan Region is training armed elements to carry out armed attacks in Syrian cities are unfounded and baseless.

"The region, depending on humanitarian basis, is supporting the Syrian people and host the fleeing people from the tragic situation, killings and destruction taking place in the Syrian cities.

"Everyone knows who defends the human rights and the rights of the Syrian people, and therefore we say that the Kurds cannot be accused with such charges."

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/319569/>

- **HR Committee describes displaced Syrians as "political refugees" (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, July 31 (AIN) -The Parliamentary Committee of Human Rights described the Syrian refugees who have entered Iraq to escape the violence and ongoing fighting in their country as "political refugees".

Member of the Committee Khalid al-Jiashi said to AIN "The Human Rights Committee held an expanded meeting with MPs of Anbar province and the Parliamentary Committee of Security and Defense as well as the Migration and Displacement Committee where it discussed the issue of entering displaced Syrians to Iraq as it considered them as political refugees."

"We also debated the mechanisms followed to accommodate these numbers which may increase in the near future and the measures followed by the government to accommodate such numbers," he added.

"We noted during the meeting the absence of plans that should be adopted by the Migration Ministry to receive the Syrian refugees as well as lack of logistic support provided to them for services, food and so forth," Jiashi pointed out.

A Parliamentary committee was formed to determine this issue and to prepare the camps and what the refugees need as services.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15410:phrc-describes-displaced-syrians-as-qpolitical-refugeesq&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Turkish sources: Uglo submit six points of discussion for Erbil (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, July 31 / Informed Turkish sources have announced that Ankara decided to make changes to its policy regarding the situation in Syria and "West Kurdistan", at a senior security meeting, confirming that its Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu will submit six points to debate with officials in Kurdistan Region during his expected visit to Erbil this week.

The sources said to (Bass) Kurdish newspaper, briefed by "Shafaq News", that "The six points include not allowing to establish any entity on a racist basis for Turkey's belief that establishing such entities would harm the Syrian revolution," asserting that "the Turkish

government is making its highest efforts to prevent the establishment of any type of federal or autonomous northern Syria before the fall of the President, Bashar al-Assad regime. "

"Ankara does not object to the establishment of a federal entity or an autonomy zone for the Kurds in northern Syria on the condition that ensures this requirement in the Syrian Constitution after the fall of Assad and must be approved by all Syrian components."

"the accelerated events north of Syria will not be a reason that would make the Turkish government stop supporting the Syrian revolution and the National Syrian council," emphasizing that "Ankara demands to support the Syrian National Council in order to prevent the PKK from establishing an influential entity in northern Syria through the cooperation of the National Council with the heads of the Syrian tribes."

The sources pointed out that "the Turkish government is preparing its measures against the PKK if it controlled the region of northern Syria," adding that "attacking the camps of the party and all the other

possibilities will be among the points that will be submitted on the discussion table in Erbil".

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/3135-turkish-sources-uglo-submit-six-points-of-discussion-for-erbil.html>

- **Iraqi Gov't places French Total on blacklist (KUNA)**

BAGHDAD, July 31 (KUNA) -- The Iraqi government said Tuesday it would place French oil company, Total, on the blacklist after the oil firm signed an agreement with Iraq's Kurdistan province.

Total will face "severe consequences" if it does not reconsider the agreement, Faisal Abdullah, spokesman of deputy premier for energy affairs Hussein Shahrestani, told KUNA.

Iraq, he added, would punish companies that sign agreements without approval of the central government in Baghdad and the ministry of oil.

"Total will be place on a blacklist for violating the Iraqi laws," he said.

Abdullah did not provide further details, and said the Iraqi government would study the measures to be taken against Total.

Earlier today Total said it had acquired a 35 percent interest in two exploration blocks in the Kurdish area of northern Iraq.

Total has signed a "farm in" agreement for the Harir and Safen blocks which are owned by Marathon Oil KDV.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2255614&Language=en>

- **Audit gives poor marks to Iraq (UPI)**

WASHINGTON, July 31 (UPI) -- Iraqi indecisiveness and poor capacity from the U.S. government doomed a training program for Iraqi police officers, an auditor said.

A U.S. State Department training program for Iraqi police is getting cut to 10 percent of the original force. Stuart Bowen, special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction, told U.S. magazine Foreign Policy it was

right to cut back the project given the lack of interest from the Iraqis.

"The U.S. wanted a large program but the State Department didn't have any inherent capacity to carry out this program when they took it over and the Iraqis were never clear what they wanted, which was apparently much, much smaller," he said.

He added that, as part of the reduction, the State Department shuttered a \$108 million Baghdad police complex because of security concerns in the city.

The SIGIR assessment comes on the heels of a series of reports critical of Iraqi development. The U.N. Security Council had expressed concern about political infighting and the human rights record in Iraq. The International Crisis Group, meanwhile, said Iraq, nearly a decade after the U.S.-led invasion, is still troubled by the legacy of Saddam Hussein.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2012/07/31/Audit-gives-poor-marks-to-Iraq/UPI-40211343742682/

2. IRAN

• Iranian VP to Visit Cairo

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Vice-President Hamid Baqayee is due to visit Cairo in the near future to invite Egypt's new President Mohammad Mursi to attend the 16th heads-of-state summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Tehran late August.



"Hamid Baqayee will deliver the invitation letter to the Egyptian president to participate in the 16th summit of the NAM members," Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi told FNA on Wednesday.

He also said that the invitation letters for all NAM members, except Egypt, have already been sent to them by the Iranian officials.

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.

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=9104252371>

- **Envoy: Iran to Withdraw Complaint if Receives S-300 from Russia**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Seyed Mahmoud Reza Sajjadi announced Tehran's readiness to withdraw its lawsuit against Russia if the latter delivers the complicated S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Iran.

"If the Russian officials agree to deliver the missiles to the Iranian side based on the signed contract between the two countries, Iran will withdraw its complaint," Sajjadi said in an interview with Russian Izvestia newspaper.

Under a contract signed in 2007, Russia was required to provide Iran with at least five S-300 air-defense systems. However, Moscow's continued delays in delivering the defense system drew criticism from the Islamic Republic on several occasions.

Russia has been refusing to deliver the system to Iran under the pretext that the system is covered by the fourth round of UN Security Council resolutions against Iran.

Then-President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree prohibiting the sale of Russian weapons, including S-300s, to Iran in 2010 after the United Nations imposed sanctions against the Islamic republic.

Iran dismissed Russia's justification that the ban on the delivery of the S-300 missile system to Iran was in line with the (US-engineered) UN Security Council

Resolution 1929, and stated that this is an air defense system which is not included in Resolution 1929.

Iran then sued Russia for breach of the contract and made Moscow return its advance payment along with its interest fees in May.

Due to the export ban on S-300 exports to Iran, Russia lost about \$1 billion dollars.



After Russia annulled the S-300 contract, Iran started making the advanced system domestically. Tehran's defense officials have announced that the early versions of the system will be unveiled as soon as next year.

After shipments of S-300 were stopped in 2009, Iran also canceled talks on buying 40 TU-204 passenger aircraft, which would have added about \$3.5 billion of revenue.

Analysts believe that President Vladimir Putin may resume shipments to Iran in retaliation for the US selling weapons to Georgia and at the same time to promote Russia as an arms exporter.

Fifty-five countries including India, China, Venezuela, Syria and the US buy Russian weapons. Sales of new-generation air defense system S-400s to China may begin as early as 2015.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252369>

- **Commander Confident about Enemies' Failure in Economic War on Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari voiced confidence that enemies will definitely fail in their economic war on Iran.

"Enemies have embarked on waging soft and economic wars, but they have done miscalculations again and they will fail in these fields again," Sayyari said in Iran's Southern port city of Bushehr on Wednesday.

Elsewhere, Sayyari lauded Iran's might and power, and noted that enemies lack the courage to even think of a possible aggression against Iran.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed the West's demand as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

In July, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei played down the western ballyhoo about the impacts of the recent embargos on Iranian economy, and said long years of western pressures have vaccinated Iranians against sanctions.

Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the West's non-stop plots against Iran all throughout the last 33 years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and stressed despite

all animosities and such hostile moves, enemies of Islam and Iran have failed in their conspiracies.

"These days, the westerners are making hues and cries about sanctions but they do not understand that they themselves have vaccinated the Iranian nation against any sanction with the embargos (that they have imposed) in the last 30 years," the Leader underscored.

"In the last three decades, the Iranian nation has stood against all plots and sanctions... and made progress in a way that today we are 100 times stronger than 30 years ago," the Leader underscored.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252363>

- **Iran's Customs Office Issues Permission for Private Sector Oil Exports**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Head of Iran's Customs Office Abbas Memarnejad announced on Wednesday that the country's private sector can start exporting Iranian crude supplies.

"The private sector can run activity in crude oil export by setting up a consortium," Memarnejad told FNA on Wednesday.

"The presence of the private sector is possible provided that the oil ministry issues the permission but from the Customs Office point of view, there is no problem for the operation of private companies in area of oil exports," he added.



His remarks came after Iranian Industry, Mine and Trade Minister Mehdi Qazanfari confirmed earlier reports that the government has decided to sell crude through the private sector.

"The government has decided to supply oil through the private sector and crude supply will no more be centered in one single (state-run) company," Qazanfari said in July.

"This way, the private sector can sell oil with lower advance payments and at prices lower than the Oil Ministry, and its revenues will be returned to the country in cash or in the form of imports of goods," he explained.

The minister described the new plan as a "great development in private sector trade", reiterating that the Iranian private sector has developed much in recent decades and it can now fulfill greater tasks compared with the past.

Qazanfari's remarks confirmed earlier reports that Iran has set up a private oil export group in an attempt to bypass the European ban on buying Iranian oil.

The ban is part of the Western sanctions aimed at pressuring Iran over its peaceful nuclear program.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252359>

- **Iran oil embargo intended to cripple Asian economies: Mehmanparast**

BEIJING, China, Aug. 1 (MMA) – The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Tuesday that one of the objectives of

the Western countries' oil embargo against Tehran is to cripple economic growth in emerging Asian economies such as China and India so that they cannot look at Iran as a major energy supplier for a long term.

“The U.S. is worried that China and some other Asian countries are making progress... and one of the ways to (crippled their economies) is to disrupt the access of the powerful Asian countries to energy resources... and due to this reason they have put sanctions on their agenda,” Ramin Mehmanparast said in a meeting with the head of the Chinese journalists union in Beijing.

In such a situation the emerging economies suffer losses because a country which is forced to constantly turn to different countries to meet its energy needs cannot experience a “stable economic growth”, Mehmanparast stated.

Mehmanparast who is a tour of China at the head of an Iranian media delegation said rapid economic progress in China has rattled Washington because the U.S. knows if this trend continues China and

India would emerge as biggest economic powers in the world.

He went on to say that while Western countries are facing economic and social crises, Iran has not faced any economic problems as the economic structure in Iran differs from the West.

He also said, “Iran and China are not competitors, rather they complete each other.”

He said even if Iran doesn't discover any new oil and gas resources, the country has enough oil to export for another 85 years and gas for 150 years.

“This shows that Iran is an important country for meeting the energy needs of the emerging economies in Asia and this has worried the West.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1663412>

- **Iran, Oman to launch direct flights**

TEHRAN, Aug. 1 (MNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Oman Hossein Noushabadi announced that direct flights between

Tehran and Muscat will be launched on August 31.

Noushabadi said, “There had been talks about running direct flights between Iran and Oman for a long time, and eventually with the efforts of the Iranian embassy and the Omani government along with the cooperation of Iran Civil Aviation Organization it became a reality.”

To facilitate more interaction between the two countries flights will be done every day including Fridays, he stated.

He said the flights will be operated by Oman Air which was chosen as the best airline in the Middle East in 2010.

Ambassador Noushabadi went on to say that Iran and Oman enjoy friendly and historical relations and the officials from both countries are determined to strengthen political and cultural ties.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1663212>

- **Annan plan is the only solution to Syria crisis, Tehran insists**

TEHRAN, July 31 (MNA) – On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi insisted on Tehran’s position that the peace plan presented by Kofi Anan is the only solution to the deteriorating crisis in Syria.

Annan, the UN-Arab League joint special envoy on Syria, has put forward a six-point plan for ending the crisis in Syria, which calls for a UN-supervised ceasefire by all parties, the withdrawal of soldiers and heavy weapons from cities, and the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

“We support the Kofi Annan peace plan and consider this plan as the only meaningful solution (to get) out of this dilemma,” Salehi stated in a meeting with the visiting Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Halit Cevik.

He again said Tehran is ready to host and pave the way for talks between the Syrian government and the opposition groups.

The top Iranian diplomat also said this view that the Syrian government is headed for a collapse is just an illusion.

For his part, the Turkish deputy foreign minister said if Syria disintegrates its

repercussions will leave adverse effect on the whole region.

Cevik also said, “One should not interfere in Syria and the people of this country themselves should decide about the future of their country.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1662953>

- **Pakistan’s Senate chairman to travel to Tehran**

TEHRAN, July 31 (MNA) – The chairman of Pakistan’s Senate will travel to Tehran on Thursday for a four-day visit.

Syed Nayyar Hussain Bukhari will meet President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi.

In these meetings Hussain Bukhari will discuss relations and regional issues with the top Iranian officials.

He also plans to travel to the shrine city of Mashhad where he will meet with the governor of Razavi Khorasan Province.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1662512>

- **No need for emergency OPEC meeting, oil price is fair: Iran**

TEHRAN, July 31 (MNA) – Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi announced on Tuesday that no longer there is a need for an emergency meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries as oil prices jump over 100 dollars a barrel.

“In the light of the fact that the price of crude oil has climbed over 100 dollars an emergency meeting of OPEC members has been canceled,” Qasemi told reporters.

He also said the current price of oil is fair. “It seems that 100 dollars is a fair price.”

In early July Qasemi called for an emergency OPEC meeting to cut output after oil prices fell below \$100 a barrel.

In London trade, Brent North Sea crude for delivery in September fell 27 cents to \$106.20 a barrel.

According to reports oil prices have drifted lower as markets await U.S. and European

central bank meetings later this week amid hopes for fresh economic stimulus.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1662435>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Panetta prepared to use 'other options' to stop Iran**

US defense secretary says "we have options that we are prepared to implement to ensure" Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon as he meets with Barak, prepares to meet Netanyahu.

Ehud Barak and Leon Panetta Photo: Ariel Harmoni / GPO

The United States hinted it is prepared to use military force to stop Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon, visiting US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said on Wednesday.

Panetta made the remarks during a visit to an Iron Dome counter rocket defense system outside the city of Ashkelon together with Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

"If they continue and if they proceed with a nuclear weapon ... we have options that

we are prepared to implement to ensure that that does not happen," Panetta said.

While expressing skepticism that sanctions would succeed in stopping Iran - on Tuesday President Barack Obama announced two new rounds of sanctions against Iran's energy and banking sectors - Barak hailed the Israeli-US alliance, even while admitting that there were disagreements on Iran.

"There are disagreements but this does not affect the profound depth of our ties and we plan to keep it that way," Barak said.

Earlier, Defense Minister Ehud Barak praised Panetta for his role in enhancing security ties between the US and Israel as the two met in Tel Aviv on Wednesday.

"Ties between Israel and the US in the security realm are as strong and close as they have ever been, and without a doubt, a substantial part of the credit belongs to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta," Barak said.

Calling Panetta "not just a personal friend for many years, but a friend of Israel,"

Barak went on to say that "The US and Israel see reality in much the same way, and there is much to discuss, as the regional problems are serious and numerous."

Speaking before the meeting, Panetta said, "Our countries have a strong bond, not only of friendship but of security."

"We will do everything we can to defend both of our countries," he added.

Click here for full Jpost coverage of the Iranian threat

Ahead of Panetta's arrival in Israel on Tuesday night, Israeli officials said they expected him to press Israel to give more time for sanctions before launching a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Speaking at a press conference in Cairo shortly before departing for Israel, Panetta said he would be talking about "various contingencies," but said specific military plans would not be put forward.

"I think it is the wrong characterization to say we are going to be discussing potential

attack plans," he said. "What we are discussing are various contingencies and how we would respond."

Asked whether these included military options, he said: "We obviously continue to work on a number of options in that area, but the discussions that I hope to have with Israel are going to be more about what is the threat that we're confronting and to try to share both information and intelligence on that."

The US has said it is determined to prevent Iran from getting the bomb, but has called on Israel to give more time for increasingly severe economic sanctions to work.

"Both of our countries are committed to ensuring that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon and to that extent we continue to work together in the effort to ensure that Iran does not reach that point of developing a nuclear weapon," Panetta said.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=279653>

- **Disabled IDF veteran who self-immolated dies**

Akiva Mapiai became disabled in a training accident at age 23, at the IDF Ground Forces Command's Tze'elim training base.

Akiva Mapiai, the disabled IDF veteran who set himself on fire in Yehud in July, died of his wounds at Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer Tuesday night.

Mapiai became disabled in a training accident at age 23, at the IDF Ground Forces Command's Tze'elim training base in the western Negev.

In recent weeks, he told his siblings he had despaired of fighting for rehabilitation rights and other benefits as a disabled veteran from the Defense Ministry and social welfare services.

After falling into heavy debt, Mapiai decided to emulate Moshe Silman, the Haifa man who set himself on fire at the end of a social justice protest in Tel Aviv on July 14, and died on Friday.

Shlomo Mapiai, Akiva's brother, said he had been talking in recent days about "doing what Silman did."

Mapiai threatened suicide in the past because of the "impossible bureaucracy" involved in dealing with the Defense Ministry and social welfare authorities, the brother said.

He took part in IDF veteran rallies and hired a lawyer to help him get his benefits, a move that ended up getting him into heavy debt.

Earlier on Tuesday, another man tried to set himself on fire in Jerusalem outside the National Insurance Building to protest his dire economic situation.

The man had doused himself with flammable liquid on Ben Sira around 12:30pm. A nearby policeman realized what was happening and tackled the man to keep him from lighting any kind of flame.

The man was the sixth self-immolation attempt since Moshe Silman set himself on fire on July 14 and died of his injuries a week later. A disabled IDF veteran in Yehud set himself on fire on July 22 and is in serious condition with burns over 80% of his body.

The other self-immolation attempts were halted before they ignited the fire.

<http://www.ipost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=279626>

- **Fischer: 'Things do not look good' for economy**

BOI governor tells Knesset Finance C'tee to pass Netanyahu's tax increases, budget cuts to shield economy from potentially severe European recession, global stagnation.

Things do not look good for the Israeli and world economies, Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer told the Knesset Finance Committee Wednesday, calling on it to pass Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's controversial fiscal package of tax increases and budget cuts in preparation.

"The facts are that things do not look good. There is a not small probability of a severe recession in Europe, and if that happens, it will affect us," Fischer said. "We see growth forecasts for the US of just 2 percent. Europe is in a recession, and there will be very weak recovery next year," Fischer said, predicting that Israeli

exports would be weak for several years to come.

Fischer said that Israel currently pays 4% of GDP a year on interest for previously issued bonds, saying that reducing the deficit would lower this interest rate. "This amounts to about NIS 40 billion. With this money, we could do many things, which is why we must not let the interest rate rise," he said.

"If the money does not come in, we'll have to take more measures. It's very easy to say, 'it will be all right', especially before elections, but it is very responsible to deal with the problem now, especially when we're talking about a structural problem like the deficit," Fischer continued, adding emphasis to the issues of trapped profits and stricter tax collection. He warned,

Fischer criticized calls for increasing the deficit, which would leave people with a lower tax burden and provide more government benefits, saying, "we've already raised the deficit. This increases the burden on the following generations."

The 2013 deficit, he said, would reach 4.5% of GDP if taxes are not raised, and may even pass 6% thereafter.

The possibility of a split in Euro zone could lead to financial crisis, or even a "Lehman Brothers II," Fischer said. The collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank in 2008 sent the world economy plummeting. "The economy must be ready in advance, not afterwards. We must maintain financial stability, as well as fiscal stability and the budget."

It is better for Israel to raise taxes now, during a period of growth, than find itself in a recession, when raising taxes can further entrench a struggling economy, he said.

Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz decided Tuesday to postpone the one percent rise in value-added tax by a month, following consultation with Knesset Finance Committee chairman Moshe Gafni.

VAT was supposed to rise from 16 to 17 percent on Wednesday, August 1, but the increase will now be implemented on September 1 in order to allow businesses time to prepare, the Treasury said.

The cabinet approved the VAT increase Monday as part of a series of sweeping austerity measures that it hopes will raise NIS 14-15 billion next year and reduce the budget deficit by 1.5%.

The austerity package included a 1% income tax hike for those earning NIS 8,881-41,830 per month, 2% surtax for all income above NIS 67,000 per month and across-the-board expenditure cuts.

<http://www.jpost.com/Business/BusinessNews/Article.aspx?id=279639>

- **Mofaz: PM tries to deflect criticism with Iran talk**

Opposition leader says Israel should only strike Iran's nuclear facilities if it sets program back 10 years.

Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz Photo: Marc Israel Sellem / The Jerusalem Post

Opposition Leader Shaul Mofaz on Wednesday accused Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of using the Iranian nuclear issue to deflect criticism of his policies on the economy and the Tal Law.

In an interview with Israel Radio, Mofaz said that the prime minister was concerned about opposition to tax increases and spending cuts, including a notable increase to gas prices.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu hit the airwaves, giving interviews to four major evening news shows in which he reiterated that Israel would control its own decisions about attacking Iran. Responding to Netanyahu's interviews, Mofaz told Israel Radio that the prime minister had lost confidence and was stressed about the widespread criticism of his inability to replace the Tal Law on haredi enlistment before it expired on Tuesday night.

With the Tal Law's expiry, the law reverted to vestiges left over from Israel's founding and before, meaning that, in principal, nothing should prevent the government from drafting haredim. In practice, however, the Defense Ministry has not yet decided on an official mechanism, and is unlikely to increase the haredi draft on its own.

Environmental Minister Gilad Erdan hit back at Mofaz on Wednesday, stating that

Mofaz's criticism was "ridiculous," Israel Radio reported.

Erdan said that the media had fanned the flames of the Iranian issue, that Netanyahu's interviews on Tuesday were merely a response and that Mofaz should not criticize Netanyahu for responding to inaccuracies being reported in the media.

The minister said that over four years ago, Mofaz himself said attacking Iran would be unavoidable.

Erdan added the prime minister would clearly prefer the US to lead any attack on Iran, but that it was still important to make it clear to the world that Israel always reserves the right to act unilaterally to defend itself.

Addressing the Iran question himself, Mofaz said that the US must lead the fight against its program. Iran, he said, poses a threat to the whole world, not just to Israel.

[Click here for full Jpost coverage of the Iranian threat](#)

Mofaz added that sanctions needed more time to pressure Iran and that an attack should be a last alternative. He further qualified the condition for an attack, saying it only made sense if it could set back Iran's nuclear program at least ten years.

There is disagreement among analysts as to how far back an Israeli attack would set Iran's program, though most analysts agree that a US-led attack would take it back considerably further.

<http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=279629>

- **PA, Israel agree on revenue revamp**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- The Palestinian Authority and Israel agreed on a revamp of revenue collection that may help relieve the Palestinian government's deepening debt crisis, officials said Tuesday.

The aid-dependent Palestinian economy in the occupied West Bank is facing a deepening financial crisis due to a drop in aid from Western backers and wealthy

Gulf states as well as Israeli restrictions on trade.

An Israeli Finance Ministry statement said the sides agreed on steps that would better facilitate the movement of goods between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and reduce illegal trade and tax evasion, measures that could increase revenue.

Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz signed off on the arrangements that will begin to be implemented on January 2013.

"I am certain that the arrangements concluded will help strengthen the economic base of the Palestinian Authority, through bolstering our tax system and increasing revenue from the proper collection of taxes," the statement quoted Fayyad as saying.

The new measures include the use of advanced technologies that will improve both sides' monitoring flow of goods as well as the construction of pipelines that will transfer petroleum products from Israel to the Palestinian Authority.



Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and interim peace deals have tasked it with levying taxes and customs duties on the Palestinian Authority's behalf, amounting to around \$100 million a month, on goods imported into the territories.

Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians broke down in 2010 in a dispute over Israeli settlement building in the West Bank. Under interim peace agreements the Palestinian Authority exercises limited self-rule in the West Bank.

A brief report by the International Monetary Fund on the economic situation in May described the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis as "very challenging" and said foreign aid was "far less than needed to finance the deficit" of around \$1.3 billion in 2012.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=509007>

- **Egypt denies Mursi letter sent to Israel's Peres**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- Israel said Tuesday it had received a letter from Egypt's President Mohamed Mursi indicating he wanted to work for peace in the Middle East, but Mursi's office later denied sending it.

An Israeli official, who asked to remain anonymous, said the denial was to be expected, due to the sensitivity of the issue.

Israeli President Shimon Peres's office said earlier Tuesday he had received a letter from the Muslim Brotherhood's Mursi, in the first such missive to Israel since Mursi took office at the end of last month.

The letter, distributed by Peres's office, said: "I am looking forward to exerting our best efforts to get the Middle East peace process back to its right track in order to achieve security and stability for all peoples of the region, including (the) Israeli people."

Hours later, Mursi's spokesman branded the letter a fake.

"The letter that the media reported to have been sent from President Mursi to Israel was fake. President Mursi has not sent anything to Israel," spokesman Yasser Ali told Reuters.

An official from Peres' office said the letter was authentic.

"It was received by the Egyptian ambassador and handed over (to Peres's office). The denial was to be expected, given the letter's high publicity in Israeli and Egyptian media," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.

Peres's office had distributed a copy of the letter to media, as well as a copy of an Egyptian embassy message sent along with it. The official spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.



The Egyptian embassy in Israel could not be reached for comment.

Last June, an Iranian news agency reported it spoke to Mursi a few hours before the announcement of the election results, but his spokesman then also denied that the interview took place.

A second Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity, described Mursi's letter as being one that gave "a general message with a positive spirit, but did not indicate any new direction" in bilateral relations.

Alarm in Israel over Mursi election

Politicians in Israel had expressed alarm in private over the election of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mursi in June's presidential vote and fear that over time their

country's peace treaty with Egypt could be eroded.

Egypt's ousted President Hosni Mubarak had guaranteed the 1979 peace treaty with Israel for decades.

The Muslim Brotherhood is ideologically hostile to Israel and linked to Hamas which runs the Gaza Strip. Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist.

The presidency in Israel is a largely ceremonial post. Nobel peace-prize-winner Peres had sent Mursi two letters, his office said, one congratulating him for winning the vote and a second letter of greetings to mark the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had also sent Mursi a letter congratulating him on his electoral victory. He has not yet received a reply.

The Middle East peace process has stalled, with US-brokered negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians breaking down in 2010, with no prospects of any swift resumption of talks.c

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=509025>

- **Newspapers Review: Palestinian-Israeli Meeting on Economy Dominates Daily**

RAMALLAH, August 1, 2012 (WAFA) – The main front page story of Wednesday's issue of al-Ayyam Arabic newspaper highlighted a Palestinian-Israeli meeting to discuss taxation and other economic issues in a move to limit Palestinian financial losses from tax revenues.

The prime headline in al-Quds daily reported on official figures disclosed by the Israeli government showing that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu government's spending on West Bank settlements has increased by 38% in 2011.

Israeli media reports on a letter from the Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi to his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres in which he vowed to help revive the Palestinian-Israeli peace process appeared on the front page of al-Hayat al-Jadida. The Egyptian presidency issued a formal denial of the reports.

The three dailies featured statements by Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Islamic movement in Israel, warning of the ongoing Israeli excavations threatening al-Aqsa Mosque and the elaborate Israeli schemes to judaize Jerusalem.

Al-Ayyam focused on the violent outbreaks in Syria as battles continue between the Syrian army and the opposition troops who seized new sites in Aleppo. The daily printed a photo of two Syrian fighters preparing anti-aircraft gun in the city.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20381>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Darfur price protest turns bloody**

Sudanese police report eight deaths in protest over high prices in Nyala in Darfur.

NYALA, Sudan - Eight people were killed Tuesday during a protest sparked by high prices in Sudan, police said, in the worst violence since Arab Spring-style demonstrations began more than six weeks ago.

"Eight citizens were killed and 24 injured, including three police who are in a serious condition," the official SUNA news agency quoted police as saying.

They are the first officially confirmed deaths related to scattered anti-regime protests which started around the country in mid-June.

An activist youth movement, Sudan Change Now, accused security forces of firing live ammunition and said 12 people, many of them teenagers, were killed.

Police did not give the cause of death but said officers used a "low level of force" to control the situation after demonstrators burned a petrol station and police facilities in the city of Nyala.

A witness earlier said that police had fired tear gas at the demonstrators scattered in groups around Nyala's main market. He said protesters threw stones at government buildings and burned tyres in the street.

Like other demonstrators in Sudan, they repeated a call made by Arab Spring

protesters around the region: "The people want the fall of the regime."

Four bleeding protesters and three security officers were taken away for medical treatment from the demonstration, the witness said.

Nobody was allowed inside the city's hospital where a crowd had gathered outside, he added.

Demonstrations in Sudan started on June 16 when University of Khartoum students voiced opposition to high food prices, starting the longest-running public challenge to the 23-year regime of President Omar al-Bashir.

Inflation reached 37 percent year-on-year in June and jumped almost 10 points in May.

After Bashir announced austerity measures, including tax hikes and an end to cheap fuel, scattered protests spread to include a cross-section of people, often in groups of 100 or 200, around the capital Khartoum and in other parts of Sudan.

Protests have dwindled during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began on July 20.

But a strike by public transport drivers upset over high fuel prices has added to the burden of Nyala residents.

The strike apparently triggered a protest on Monday by more than 200 students, which escalated on Tuesday, the African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID) said.

"This has been happening on the main roads and in the main market area. There's been some damage to buildings," said UNAMID spokesman Christopher Cycmanick.

Bothina Mohmed Ahmed, spokeswoman for the South Darfur government, told AFP the demonstration started because students "rejected the price of transport announced by the government".

She added that "other groups", whom she did not identify, attacked government property during the protest.

"But now the situation is calm and under control," Ahmed said.

"We and the security authorities have a plan to secure the town in the coming days."

State governor Hamad Ismail said that the demonstrators' targeting of government facilities was "similar to what the rebel groups are always doing."



"We confirm that what happened had no link to the economic situation," SUNA quoted him as saying.

Some activists in Khartoum have said that although tear gas, rubber bullets and beatings have been commonly used against protesters, the government fears creating a martyr.

In 1964, the death of student Ahmed al-Qureshi sparked Khartoum's "October Revolution" which brought down the military government then in power after tens of thousands protested.

During an economic crisis in 1985, huge crowds in the capital marched in an uprising which led to the bloodless overthrow of president Gaafar al-Nimeiry.

Sudanese proudly point to this history which occurred long before the Arab Spring revolts in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and elsewhere since late 2010.

But Darfur is a long way from Khartoum, and the country's far-western region is no stranger to killings.

Banditry, inter-ethnic fighting and clashes between rebel groups and government forces continue in Darfur although violence is much lower than at its peak in 2003 and 2004 after non-Arab ethnic groups rose up against the Khartoum regime.

The United Nations says more than 300,000 people died in Darfur, while the

Khartoum government put the death toll at 10,000.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53676>

- **Cairo: Morsi sent no letter to Peres**

Egyptian President's spokesman calls reports of Morsi's letter to Israeli counterpart 'slander'.

CAIRO - Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi has not sent a letter to his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres, state media reported on Wednesday.

The Israeli president's office had said on Tuesday that the Islamist leader wrote to Peres pledging to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"President Morsi did not send any letters to the Israeli president," Morsi's spokesman Yassir Ali told the state-owned Al-Ahram newspaper, calling reports that he had done so "slander."

Peres's office had quoted Morsi as saying that he looked "forward to exerting our

best efforts to get the Middle East peace process back to its right track."



Peres, a Nobel peace laureate, sent Morsi a letter of congratulations following his election as the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Morsi, the country's first Islamist president, has kept Israel at arm's length since he took office on June 30. Egypt was the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, in 1979.

He is expected to improve relations with the Islamist Hamas rulers of Gaza, considered terrorists by Israel, the United States and the European Union.

Palestinian officials said this month that Cairo has eased visa requirements for Gazans under 40, relaxing restrictions on the enclave that Israel and Egypt placed

under semi-blockade after Hamas took over in 2007.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53681>

- **Military intelligence department in east Libya bombed**

Bomb blast shakes department of military intelligence in Benghazi amid no casualties.

BENGHAZI, Libya - A bomb blast shook the department of military intelligence in the eastern city of Benghazi early Wednesday, causing material damage to the building, Libyan security sources said.

"The department of military intelligence was bombed," a senior security officer said, adding that the level of damage to the two-storey building suggested it was hit by an improvised explosive device.

Adjacent buildings were also touched by the dawn blast, he added.

"The incident did not result in injury to any of the guards of the residents of neighbouring buildings," said the official who did not wish to be named.



The identity of the attackers, he said, remains unknown.

Khaled Haidar, spokesman for the director of national security in Benghazi, said that the eastern city has witnessed a series of security breaches over the past week.

These included the discovery and neutralisation of a bomb outside the iconic Tibesti hotel on Sunday.

Friday saw a hand grenade hit the appeals court and a rocket punch the outside wall of the main prison. Both incidents caused only minor material damage to the buildings targeted, he said.

Also on Friday, Haidar added, security forces diffused two time-bombs planted by the office of national security in Benghazi.

The Mediterranean city of Benghazi is the cradle of the revolt that toppled long-time dictator Moamer Kadhafi last year.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53680>

- **Ennahda reaches out to Tunisians' money to compensate its former political prisoners**

Hundreds gather outside headquarters of Constituent Assembly in sit-in protest against what they called a 'Grand theft' by Islamist-led government.

TUNIS - Hundreds of Tunisians gathered on Tuesday outside the headquarters of the National Constituent Assembly in a sit-in protest against what they called a "Grand theft" organised by the Islamist-led government.

Tunisian government was to present a draft law before the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) for the compensation of former political prisoners, mostly Islamists from the ruling Ennahda party.



Citizens, representatives of civil society and the Union of diplomas unemployed chanted slogans such as: "Theft is a crime", "People of Tunisia wake up!, The nahdhaouis are robbers," "the people are tired of new Trabelsi", in reference to ousted first lady Leila Ben Ali's family.

Members of the Tunisian Union of Unemployed University Graduates (TUUUG), activists, bloggers and members of the Tunisian Association of Freethinkers participated in the protest.

Activists have launched since last Friday, an e-campaign against the Ennahda Islamist party and its leader Rashed Ghannouchi following the resignation of Tunisia's Finance Minister.

Hussein Dimassi resigned last week over "differences with the Islamist-led government".

A statement from Dimassi's office said, "The draft law for the compensation of beneficiaries of the general amnesty is the most serious of all, it was the straw that broke the camel's back".

"It will result in a very heavy expenditure for the state's budget considering the high number of beneficiaries and the amount of the compensation," it added.

Tunisian newspapers said the plan may cost as much as 750 million dinars.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53669>

- **Sectarian clashes flare in Egypt, injuries reported**

Violent sectarian clashes broke out Wednesday in Giza Governorate south of Cairo after a young Muslim man was killed by a Christian last week, United Press International (UPI) cited an unnamed local source as saying.

The source said dozens of Muslims and Christians used firearms and other weapons during the clashes that occurred

in the village of Dahshour in Giza, which wounded a number of citizens.

Several Christians' homes were also scorched.

According to the source, security forces arrived at the scene and cordoned off the area. However, when they attempted to prevent the Mar Gerges Church from being burned, dozens of Muslims attacked the security forces members, who were later transferred to nearby hospitals

The sectarian clashes flared early Wednesday morning after Maath Mohammed Hassan died from burns inflicted by a Christian laundry worker last Thursday following a dispute between the two. The row later degenerated into clashes between Muslims and Christians.

Last Thursday's fighting left five people dead.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Mikati's cabinet to provide reinforcements for army**

Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Tuesday congratulated the Lebanese army and citizens on the occasion of Army Day, and commended its role in “curbing strife.”

He also said that the cabinet was working on providing for the needs of the army.

“The cabinet is preparing a comprehensive plan divided into four years to reinforce the army's capabilities with around \$1.6 billion,” the National News Agency quoted Mikati as saying.

He also said that the cabinet will provide the funds through a draft law to be submitted to the parliament and “through the cabinet's contacts [aiming at] holding an international gathering under the umbrella of the United Nations.”

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **President Suleiman calls for defense strategy focused on army**

Lebanon's President Michel Suleiman on Wednesday emphasized the need to embrace a defense strategy with the Lebanese army as its main pillar.

“There is a pressing need to support and prepare the army, as there is also an urgent need to lay down a defense strategy focused on the army,” Suleiman said during a ceremony for marking the army's 67th anniversary at the Fayadieh barracks.

The president also rejected the proliferation of illegitimate weapons in the country.

“No to arms randomly proliferated [in Lebanon],” he said.

Suleiman also called for keeping Lebanon away from political axes and regional conflicts.

However, he added that the country should not be isolated from “just causes, particularly the Palestinian [one].”

Moreover, Suleiman called on the judicial authority to issue rulings against

individuals who had offended Lebanon's military institution.

"The army is the just force that is capable of working [in line with] laws."

As for the Lebanese national dialogue sessions, Suleiman said: "The Baabda Declaration [was issued] to emphasize that all [Lebanese] groups are committed to keeping Lebanon away from any regional struggles."

The "Baabda Declaration" was issued following June's national dialogue session at the Baabda Presidential Palace during which Lebanon's rival political leaders resumed talks aimed at tackling the thorny issue of Hezbollah's weapons, against a backdrop of mounting tension over the turmoil in neighboring Syria.

Lebanon's national dialogue committee, chaired by Suleiman, convened on June 11 and June 25 at the Presidential Palace after an 18 month suspension. The third meeting is set for August 16.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Four injured in Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp**

Four people were injured in a personal dispute that escalated into a gunfire exchange in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh outside the southern city of Saida, the National News Agency reported.

The report added that Fatah Party and Islamic Movement members were involved in the quarrel.

The NNA identified the injured as Abdel Hamid as-Saadi, Mahmoud Serhan, Rami Mouss and Kheir Ouweid.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

6. SYRIA

- **First clashes near Christian areas of Damascus, says NGO**

Fighting between soldiers and rebels broke out on Wednesday for the first time near two Christian districts of Damascus, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Fighting erupted at dawn on Wednesday on the outskirts of the Bab Tuma and Bab Sharqi neighborhoods. First indications are that one soldier has been killed," the Britain-based group said in a statement.

"This is fighting in areas where it has not happened before. These are areas where the rebels have so far not had access," Observatory chief Rami Abdel rahman told AFP.

One witness said rebels attacked a military position outside Bab Sharqi at 4 a.m. (0100 GMT) in a clash that lasted for 15 minutes.

An AFP correspondent said calm later returned to the area.

Bab Tuma and Bab Sharqi are traditional Christian quarters in the Old City of Damascus, previously popular with tourists and the location of several hotels. They have also been the scene of several pro-regime protests in the past.

Earlier the Local Coordination Committees (LCC) that organizes protests on the ground, reported a blast and heavy

gunfire from Baghdad Street, a main arterial route through the city.

The LCC also said that the capital's southern suburb of Tadamun was hit by mortar fire at dawn.

Damascus residents heard explosions and intermittent gunfire late on Tuesday in several districts, notably in the southwestern neighborhood of Kfar Sousa.

Fighting in that district broke out again on Monday after a lull when rebels attacked a checkpoint of regime forces using rocket-propelled grenades.

Since July 20, the battle between the rebels and government forces has focused on the country's commercial capital Aleppo in the north.

On Tuesday 154 people – among them 35 civilians, 63 soldiers and 27 rebels – were killed in violence nationwide, around half in Aleppo.

Both troops and rebels poured into Aleppo on Tuesday as both sides battered down for the long haul after 40 police

were killed on day four of a pivotal battle in the nearly 17-month conflict.

According to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 20,000 people have been killed since the uprising broke out in mid-March last year.

There is no way to independently verify the figure, while the UN has stopped keeping count.

To read more:

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=424078#ixzz22IDXwP6x>

Only 25% of a given NOW Lebanon article can be republished. For information on republishing rights from NOW Lebanon:

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Syrian rebels say intelligence branches next Aleppo target**

Rebels in Syria have now set their sights on seizing intelligence branches in the country's commercial capital of Aleppo after taking three police stations there, a rebel commander told AFP on Wednesday.

The rebels seized three police stations on Tuesday: in Bab al-Nayrab, the southern district of Salhin and in Hanano. Rebel leader Ferzat Abdel Nasser called the takeovers "a small victory that is good for morale."

"But the most important thing is to take over the intelligence branches," said the general, who deserted from the Syrian army a month ago. "If these sites fall, victory is possible."

An AFP correspondent in Aleppo on Tuesday witnessed the rebel seizure of the Salhin police station, the largest in the south of the city.

They also executed a general the rebels said was known for taking part in the bloody repression of the Syrian revolt, which is now in its 17th month.

The conflict in Aleppo has raged since July 20, with regime troops and rebels sending reinforcements to the city for a battle that one Syrian security source said was likely to last for weeks.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Key military targets attacked: Rebels insist Aleppo is their Syria's Benghazi**

Syrian rebels attack key military targets, overrun police stations in Aleppo, killing 40 officers as pivotal battle for commercial capital rages on.

Syrian rebels attacked key military targets and overran two police stations in Aleppo, killing 40 officers, a watchdog said, as the pivotal battle for the commercial capital raged on Tuesday.

Clashes between the rebels and loyalists of President Bashar al-Assad were also reported in the capital Damascus, the eastern city of Deir Ezzor and Daraa in the south, cradle of the more than 16-month uprising.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Aleppo was on Tuesday rocked by the fiercest fighting of a military offensive on rebels in the city, which came after the government had warned of a looming "mother of all battles."

Rebels used rocket-propelled grenades in pre-dawn attacks on a military court, an air force intelligence headquarters and a branch of the ruling Baath Party in Aleppo,

said the Observatory's Rami Abdel Rahman.

Later, "hundreds of rebels attacked the police stations in Salhin and Bab al-Nayrab (neighbourhoods) and at least 40 policemen were killed during the fighting, which lasted for hours," Abdel Rahman said.

The police chief was among those killed at the Salhin station in the south of the city, while three vehicles were destroyed, he added.

The attacks came as the UN observer mission said government forces were using helicopters, tanks and artillery to fight the rebels, while appealing for both sides to protect civilians in the city of 2.7 million people.

Through the night, government troops had shelled the neighbourhoods of Salaheddin, Marjeh, Firdoss, Al-Mashhad, Sakhur, Al-Shaar and Ansari, before the army and rebels clashed at dawn in Al-Meesr and Al-Adaa.

A security official in Damascus said on Monday that the army had regained some

of Salaheddin but it was facing "a very strong resistance." The rebels, however, denied that the army had advanced even "one metre" (yard).

"The fierce fighting in Aleppo shows how crucial this city is for a regime that does not want a Benghazi in Syria," said Abdel Rahman, referring to the coastal city secured by Libyan rebels as a base in their fight to bring down strongman Moamer Gathafi.

Gunmen from loyalist Arab tribes in Aleppo, including the al-Berri family, had joined the fray and were fighting alongside the army.

"All of this links back to calls by Syrian media and talking heads on some Lebanese satellite stations that loyal Syrian citizens should take up arms and fight with the regime troops," Abdel Rahman added.

Rebels on Monday seized the strategic Anadan checkpoint, some five kilometres (3.8 miles) northwest of Aleppo, securing a direct route to the Turkish border.

"During the next few hours, the impact of rebel control over this checkpoint will be proven by the amount of supplies brought to Aleppo," said Abdel Rahman.

The fight for Aleppo erupted on Saturday when the regime launched an all-out offensive to overrun rebel-held districts, after massing its forces on the city's outskirts for two days.

United Nations mission chief Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye said he was "deeply concerned about the ongoing violence from both sides in Aleppo."

"My observers there have reported an upsurge in the violence, with helicopters, tanks and artillery being used," the Senegalese general said.

"It is imperative that both sides respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians."

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said an estimated 200,000 people had fled from Aleppo in two days and that an unknown number were still trapped in the city.

Many people in Aleppo had sought shelter in schools and other public buildings.



"They urgently need food, mattresses and blankets, hygiene supplies and drinking water," she said.

The Observatory, which reported 93 people killed across Syria on Monday, says it cannot swiftly give an authoritative death toll for the fierce battles in Aleppo.

Elsewhere in Syria, clashes erupted in multiple districts of Deir Ezzor city, including near a police station, while one civilian was killed by sniper fire, the Observatory said.

In the southern province of Daraa, regime troops shelled a camp for displaced persons as the towns of Tafas and Al-Ghariyeh also came under shelling, leaving an unknown number of casualties.

Clashes and the sound of explosions were reported at the University of Idlib in the northwestern city.

US President Barack Obama and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke by telephone Monday "to coordinate efforts to accelerate a political transition in Syria," the White House said.

Obama and Erdogan shared their concerns over the crackdown "and the deteriorating humanitarian conditions throughout Syria as a result of the regime's atrocities."

On Tuesday, Iran's military said it will "not allow the enemy to advance" in its key ally Syria, but that it does not yet see the need to directly intervene in the country.

More than 20,000 people have been killed in Syria since the anti-regime revolt began in March 2011, according to the Observatory. There is no way to independently verify the figure, while the UN has stopped keeping count.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53661>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **"Al-Qaeda" attack kills three in South Yemen**

Two Yemeni soldiers and a civilian were killed in an attack on Wednesday by Al-Qaeda militants on a police station in the southern town of Jaar, a local official said.

"Members of Al-Qaeda attacked the station with automatic weapons and hurled a grenade, killing two soldiers and a civilian," said the official.

Abdulaif Sayed, the chief of the local Popular Resistance Committees which fights the Islamists alongside the army, voiced fears of a return of Al-Qaeda militants to the town.

In addition to Jaar, Al-Qaeda gunmen also controlled Abyan's provincial capital of Zinjibar, which they overran in May last year, before being driven out in a mid-June all-out offensive by the army.

But militants remain in nearby mountains, Sayed said, complaining of an absence of security forces in the province.

Locals also expressed fears of a return of the militants.

"Al-Qaeda has disappeared, but life is not really back to normal," said Salama Ahmed, a Zinjibar resident.

"The state is absent and there is no water, nor electricity," he said.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Amnesty urges UAE to release or try activists**

Amnesty International urged UAE authorities on Tuesday to release activists or provide them with fair trials, saying 50 people have been arrested in a clampdown on peaceful dissent.

"UAE authorities must halt the ongoing crackdown on peaceful dissent," the London-based organization said, adding that 35 men are believed to have been detained since July 16, bringing the total of arrests since March to 50.

"The whereabouts of all 35 are unknown, and they are thought to be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment, which

Amnesty International has previously documented in the UAE," it said.

On July 15, the UAE announced that it had dismantled a group it said was plotting against state security and challenging the constitution of the Gulf state without identifying their affiliation or the number of arrests.

"This wave of arrests is deeply disturbing and appears to be part of an ongoing attack on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in the UAE," said Ann Harrison, Amnesty's deputy Middle East and North Africa director.

She urged authorities to disclose the location of the 35 men and allow them immediate contact with their families.

"Incommunicado detention is known to facilitate torture and other ill-treatment," she said.

Lawyers Mohammed al-Roken, Mohammed al-Mansoori and Salem al-Shehhi "are believed to be prisoners of conscience, held solely in connection with the peaceful expression of their views or

for carrying out their professional duties," she said.

They "must be released immediately and unconditionally."

"Any others held must be released unless they are to be tried promptly on an internationally recognizable criminal charge in full accordance with international fair trial standards," she said.

Last week, Dubai Police chief General Dahi Khalfan accused the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the emerging force in the Arab world after the Arab Spring uprisings, of plotting against Gulf monarchies, claiming the detainees were linked to the group.

The UAE has not seen the kind of pro-reform protests that have swept other Arab countries, including Gulf neighbors Bahrain and Oman, since last year.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Saleh loyalists wreak havoc in Yemen: Interior ministry attacked**

Firefight between Yemeni forces, gunmen dressed in police uniforms outside interior

ministry headquarters leave three people dead.

Saleh left, loyalists didn't

SANAA - Three people were killed and nine wounded on Tuesday in a firefight between Yemeni security forces and gunmen dressed in police uniforms outside the interior ministry headquarters, a medic said.

Two gunmen and a civilian were killed in the clashes, said a medical official at a police public hospital in Al-Hasaba, a northern district of Yemen's capital Sanaa.

"Nine police officers and gunmen were also wounded," the official said, adding most of them suffered "serious injuries."

The gunmen stormed the ministry later in the afternoon, backed by policemen from the central security services and loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, a police official said.

"They took control of the ministry," the official said.

The gunmen, who were previously working unofficially in Yemen's police department, have been surrounding the ministry since Sunday, demanding that they be enrolled back into the impoverished country's police force.

The exchange of fire using Kalashnikovs was heard intermittently throughout the day, witnesses said.

The gunmen had served unofficially among the ranks of Yemen's police when it was led by Mohammed Abdullah al-Qawsi during Saleh's rule, security officials said.



Qawsi had promised to recruit them officially before President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi sacked him in May.

The gunmen stormed the ministry on Sunday and observed a sit-in before

setting a two-day ultimatum for officials to meet their demands that include compensation payments and official employment.

Last year's uprising in Yemen ended when Saleh signed a Gulf-brokered agreement under which he agreed to transfer power to Hadi.

Based on the agreement, Hadi must restructure the military and security apparatus, which had been controlled by officials with close ties to Saleh and accused of corruption.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53668>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• One dead, four hurt in mine blast in Afghanistan

Press TV

July 31, 2012

At least one civilian has been killed and four others have been wounded in a mine explosion in Afghanistan's eastern province of Laghman, Press TV reports.

Sarhadi Zwak, a Laghman provincial spokesman, said the incident took place on Tuesday when a 13-year-old boy hammered an unexploded wartime mine with a stone in a house in the city of Mehter Lam.

Zwak said the boy was killed and four other members of his family were wounded and taken to a local hospital.

Earlier this year, a UN body warned that nearly 1.3 million Afghans are at risk from landmines and other unexploded ordnance, which have littered Afghanistan during past conflicts.

"We know exactly where these minefields are. They are all over the country," said Alan Macdonald, program director for the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA).

"By the end of 2011, there remained 6,048 hazardous areas affecting 588 kilometers (365 miles) across 1,930 communities," he said.

Some 375 people were killed or injured by anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines or

unexploded ordnance in 2011, according to the MACCA.

Meanwhile, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), also referred to as roadside bombs, are by far the most lethal weapon the Taliban militants use against Afghan forces, US-led foreign troops, and civilians.

Insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of about 130,000 US-led forces in the war-torn country.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **NATO troops' death toll up in Afghanistan in July**

By Farid Behbud, Abdul Haleem

KABUL, July 31 (Xinhua) -- The death toll of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the Afghan war has slightly increased in July compared with the previous month.

A total of 46 ISAF service members have lost their lives, including four service members who died in non-battle incidents in July, according to the iCasualties, a website tracking the casualties of NATO-

led troops in the war on terror in Afghanistan.

Out of 46 deaths in July, according to the website, 41 are U.S. soldiers; while fatalities of the foreign forces totaled 39 in June including 29 Americans.

The latest casualties of the foreign troops in Afghanistan were the killing of two U.S. Marines in an insurgent attack in western Afghan province of Badghis on Sunday July 29, the ISAF forces confirmed.

A Georgian soldier who got injured in southern Helmand province in a hostile fire in January this year died of his wounds in a Georgian hospital on Sunday, according to reports.

Some 130,000-strong NATO-led ISAF with nearly 90,000 of them Americans are currently stationed in Afghanistan to fight Taliban militants and help stabilize the war-battered nation.

The Taliban militants which have been waging over a decade-long insurgency since a U.S.-led invasion ousted their regime in late 2001, launched an annual spring offensive from May 3 this year

against Afghan security forces and the NATO-led coalition troops across the militancy-plagued country.

The Taliban-led attacks have increased by 10 percent within the past three month compared with the first three months of the current year, a NATO spokesman confirmed earlier this month.

"In terms of enemy initiated attacks I can confirm that if you look at the last 12 weeks we had a slide increase of enemy initiated attacks of about 10 percent," Brigadier General Gunter Katz, a spokesman for the NATO-led ISAF, told reporters at a weekly press briefing on July 16.

On Saturday, two U.S. soldiers with the NATO-led ISAF were killed in an insurgent attack in eastern Wardak province.

A single deadliest attack against the coalition forces was a roadside bombing or Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast that left six American soldiers dead in Wardak province on July 8.

The IED attack occurred in Mullah Khil area of Wardak's provincial capital Maidan

Shar 35 km west of Afghan capital of Kabul, according to Wardak provincial administration spokesman Shahidullah Shahid.

Separately, two NATO service members were injured when a military helicopter went down in western Afghanistan on July 18; no more details have been released by the coalition.

Days earlier, on July 16, two U.S. soldiers with the NATO-led coalition lost their lives in a Rocket-Propelled Grenade attack in Shah Wali Kot district of Taliban birthplace the southern Kandahar province.

In the latest so-called "green-on-blue" attack, a man in Afghan National Police uniform opened fire against coalition forces in Nahr-e-Saraj district of Helmand province killing three British troopers on July 1.

In 2010 and 2011, the NATO-led ISAF had respectively lost 711 service members including 499 Americans, and 566 service members including 418 Americans.

According to iCasualties, a total of 3,113 service members with the NATO-led ISAF

force have lost their lives so far in Afghanistan. Among them 2,069 Americans, 422 Britons and 622 from other troops-contributing-countries.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **Pakistan, U.S. sign agreement on NATO supply routes**

ISLAMABAD, July 31 (Xinhua) -- Pakistan and the United States on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to replace the existing arrangement for NATO supply routes.

American Charge d'Affaires in Islamabad, Richard Hoagland, and a senior Pakistani Defense Ministry official, Rear Admiral Farrokh Ahmad, signed the MoU on behalf of the two governments.

Pakistan reopened the land route for transporting supplies to the NATO-led coalition force in neighboring Afghanistan on July 3 after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton apologized for the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers in a U.S. airstrike on a border checkpost last November.

Pakistan blocked the supply line for nearly seven months before Washington agreed to tender apology.

Officials from both countries will meet once every two months to evaluate the implementation of the MoU.

Transportation of arms and ammunition via Pakistan will not be allowed except for the Afghan National Army, according to the MoU.

Transport of non-lethal cargo including food, medicine and fuel will be allowed.

The MoU will be valid till 31 December 2015 and could be extended for one year after consultations.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **US-backed Afghan militiamen joining Taliban**

Press TV

July 30, 2012

Afghan militiamen working for the US-led occupation forces have started to join the Taliban, fighting against the NATO troops, Press TV reports.

The militiamen were trained and funded by the US army to take on the Taliban militants but many of them changed sides, Press TV's Kabul correspondent said on Monday.

At least 23 militiamen recently joined the Taliban in the western Farah province, and many of them handed their US-provided weapons to the Taliban, fighting in the northern parts of the country.

Right from the beginning, the government of President Hamid Karzai opposed the US strategy but approved it after Washington applied intense pressure over his administration.

Rights groups blame the US-backed militiamen for turning their weapons on Afghan civilians. Members of these militias have also started to rob local people.

Farid Hamidi of Afghanistan's Human Rights Commission told Press TV that the militiamen also kidnap people for ransom.

He said that "the government has the responsibility to disarm these militia groups and other illegal armed groups."

The US-led war in Afghanistan began in October 2001. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan, despite the presence of about 130,000 US-led troops.

Roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices are by far the most lethal weapon Taliban militants use against foreign troops.

The high number of military casualties in Afghanistan has intensified opposition in the United States and other NATO member states to the protracted war in the country.

According to the independent website, icasualties.org, 266 foreign soldiers, 201 of them US personnel, have lost their lives in Afghanistan so far this year.

A total of 566 US-led forces died in Afghanistan in 2011. However, 2010 remains the deadliest year on record for foreign military casualties, with a death toll of 711.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

- **Afghans Hopeful, But Worried About Future**

Sharon Behn

VOA News

July 30, 2012

KABUL — During the past forty years, Afghanistan has had several national anthems and flags. After decades of political change, many worry about the next big transition after international combat forces leave in 2014.

Modest changes

There is a growing middle class in Afghanistan's cities, including the capital Kabul.

It is an increasingly urban population. They are Muslim, modest, and enjoy having fun.

Places like this bowling alley are new to Afghanistan, as is the idea of women playing sports with men, even their brothers, in public.

Sarwar Sarwari says the bowling alley opens up new possibilities. "To me, I think,

it is a step toward democracy, where you see women and men come together and play something like this," he stated. "I never had this in Afghanistan when I was a child."

But Sarwari says people are uncertain about their future. "Nervousness is all around, you can feel it in the city, within the government, within the people, when people talk around. I am hoping that things will work out to the best in this country, because people put in [worked] their hardest to make it happen," he said.

Extravagant wedding halls show there is a lot of money in some parts of Kabul.

There are many businesses investing here.

Reshaping Afghanistan

But Afghanistan's six national flags and six national anthems in less than 40 years are reminders of how different leaders tried to shape the country's direction.

Afghans are very different from 11 years ago when the Taliban was thrown out. They are more educated. More people live in cities and almost half own cell phones.

But many remain uncertain about the future.

Afghan analyst Omar Sharifi says violence will not dictate who runs the country. “Now nobody sees a coup d’etat, or overthrowing the government, or the taking by force of power as a legitimate means. The people believe in elections as a legitimate means of establishing authority,” he explained.

Despite the political changes, many women in Kabul remain too frightened to speak on camera. Privately, they say they fear losing the few rights they have gained in the past decade.

In a male-only billiards hall, patrons worry about the increasing violence and about the future of Afghanistan’s democratic government.

Yar Gul Nader Safi is pessimistic. “The future as I can see it: for the past two months there are a lot of suicide attacks, and also the Taliban they are attacking all different places. It seems to us that it [the future] will be dark,” he said.

After 40 years of dramatic political swings, many Afghans in Kabul worry that the country’s political future may be similar to its tumultuous past.

www.aopnews.com/today.html

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanriverdi 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.*

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