



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

25 SEPTEMBER 2012

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1. IRAQ

- **Khalil: Infrastructure Law involves several lacunas**

Baghdad, Sep 24 (AIN) –The rapporteur of the Parliamentary Economic Committee, Mahma Khalil, pointed out that "The Infrastructure Law involves several lacunas and some political blocs will vote on it on next Tuesday session unless these lacunas are eliminated."

Speaking to All Iraqi News Agency (AIN), he said "We wished the payment to be immediate since funds are available in the general budget," noting that "We are concerned that the law may result in heavy debts on Iraq in the future."

"This law needs new draft that will be compatible with the Iraqi Constitution and preserve the economic situation in the country," he added, rejecting "The profits of the companies that reach 8% according to this law."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19242

- **IS condemns defaming campaigns against its political figures**

Baghdad, Sep 24 (AIN) –The Iraqiya Slate condemned the political defaming campaign, led by known sides, against national figures who fought the former regime.

The spokesperson of the Iraqiya Slate, Maysoun al-Damaluji, stated in a press statement received by AIN on Monday "Issuing judicial warrants against some of the MPs of the Iraqiya Slate is groundless."

"The parliamentary Integrity Committee assured to the IS that these reports are groundless and MP, Falah al-Naqib, the former Interior Minister, is not wanted but he is called by the judicial sides as a witness," she added.

"Regarding MP, Abdul Allah al-Jouburi, where the judicially wanted individual is the former Governor of Diyala and not MP, Jouburi but they have the same names," she pointed out.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19235

- **Bolani describes Governmental Reduction as "Step towards reducing expenditure"**

Baghdad, Sep 24 (AIN) –The former Minister of Interior, MP, Jawad al-Bolani, of the Iraqiya Slate described "The Governmental Reduction as a step towards reducing the financial expenditure."

In a statement received by AIN, he assured that "The Reforms Proposal and the Governmental Reduction are completing each other."

"The reforms, in case they are actually implemented, will solve the political disputes in order to head for building the State," he added.

"The reforms will benefits the society and harm the parties that get the advantage from the negative current situation," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19243

- **Iraq's Kurdistan govt promises serious steps to implement Law Nr. 8 against Domestic Violence**

ERBIL-Hewlêr, Kurdistan region 'Iraq', Sep 24 — Kurdistan's prime minister office and Judiciary council and high commission of women's affairs meet lest Thursday and they decided to start practical steps for the implementation of Domestic Violence law Nr.8 .

And this comes after our successful campaign with another 40 Organizations including WADI, for lobbying for the implementation of the law and insisting and criticizing them in many occasions.

The practical step of Kurdistan Regional Government KRG for the law implementation are the following points :

- Establishing special court for dealing with the cases of violence against women.
- Opening a new Branch of police.
- Starting awareness campaign by high council of women's affairs.
- Improving the service in the women shelters.

The NGOs said "this is exactly the main demands we had, when we met Kurdistan

Parliament spokesperson and the high council of women's affairs on June 21, 2012".

<http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/9/state6513.htm>

- **The return of Saddam's army officers revive their hopes while raises citizen's anger**

Shafaq News, Sep 24 / officials and security experts believed that the return of former army officers to service is a move that would enhance the capabilities of the Iraqi army, while citizens stressed the need to make an accurate process of reviewing these officer's history before engaging them in sensitive places.

The General Command of the Armed Forces had called earlier the Iraqi army officers to submit their return applications for those wishing to work in the security forces, due to that Basra Operations Command has received requests from officers in the former army to be engaged in service.

Security analyst, Majid al-Sari said in an interview with "Shafaq News" that he believes that this step will enhance the

capabilities of the Iraqi army, as the former army officers have great experiences that can be employed in the service of the security side.

He adds that "returning the officers to service withdraw an important paper from the terrorist forces that are trying to employ the capabilities and the potential of the former army officers."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/reports/3617-the-return-of-saddams-army-officers-revive-their-hopes-while-raises-citizens-anger-.html>

- **Kirkuk council expresses rejection to Dijla forces deployment**

Shafaq News, Sep 24 / Kirkuk Provincial Council expressed its rejection on Monday, during a meeting with the parliament speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi on the deployment of Dijla forces in the province, demanding not to impose decisions from the center on its local government.

Nujaifi had arrived on Monday at the head of a parliamentary delegation to Kirkuk city to discuss the local elections file and the security situation in the city.

The member of the provincial council of Kirkuk Brotherhood List, Ibrahim Khalil said in an interview for "Shafaq News" that "Nujaifi had held a meeting with members of the provincial council in which several subjects have been discussed mainly the deployment of the Dijla forces."

Khalil added that the provincial council has shown its complete rejection of the deployment of those forces in the province because the security situation doesn't need that."

"The council has also discussed with Nujaifi, the local elections issue in the province," he added.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3619-kirkuk-council-show-rejection-to-dijla-forces-deployment-.html>

- **Iraq's Talabani to attend AK Party congress**

24 September 2012 / TODAY'S ZAMAN,
ANKARA

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani is a new addition to those expected to attend the upcoming party congress of Turkey's

ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), along with other important figures, such as Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leader Massoud Barzani and Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi.

According to information obtained from diplomatic sources, Talabani is among around 100 global political leaders expected to attend the fourth Regular Grand Congress, scheduled for Sept. 30. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder is also among the anticipated guests.

However, the office of AK Party Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik told Today's Zaman that the participant list for the congress has not been finalized, adding that it is too early to confirm the participation of the leaders.

As a sign of willingness to renew political relations with Iraq, the undersecretary of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, has invited his Iraqi counterpart, Abdul Amir Kamil Abi Tabikh, to Turkey for talks, and expressed the Turkish position in regards to the current state of affairs and the future of Turkish-Iraqi relations, the ministry announced in

a statement on Sept.17. Sinirlioğlu also invited his Iraqi counterpart to Turkey for talks as part of a mechanism of political consultation between the two countries, the statement further said.

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-293287-iraqs-talabani-to-attend-ak-party-congress.html>

- **NATO, Iraq signs cooperation accord**

BRUSSELS, Sept 24 (KUNA) -- NATO on Monday night announced that it has signed a cooperation agreement with Iraq which will foster closer security ties and help Iraq build up its security institutions.

NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow and Iraqi National Security Adviser Faleh Faisal Al-Fayyadh signed the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

The accord inaugurates a full-fledged partnership. The signing of the accord follows NATO's Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I) which ended last December, noted a NATO statement.

The 28-member Alliance said it is committed to assisting Iraq as it builds a

modern security sector which can cooperate with international partners.

It said that the partnership will promote dialogue and address shared threats. NATO and Iraq intend to work together to develop the capacity of Iraq's security institutions and to cultivate the expertise of its national defence academies.

The agreement also creates a framework for regular political dialogue and for training cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, crisis management, disaster relief and logistics.

The signing of the partnership accord marks the formal accession of Iraq to NATO's "partnerships family".

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2264449&language=en>

- **Iraqi MP Dismisses Shipment of Iranian Weapons to Syria as "Baseless"**

TEHRAN, Sep 24 (FNA)- A senior Iraqi legislator dismissed the US claims that Iran sends weapons to Syria via his country, and stressed that certain Arab regimes should be condemned for the massacre of the Syrian people.

"Iraq is opposed to arming either side of the conflict in Syria," member of the Iraqi parliament's Security and Defense Commission Abbas al-Bayati told FNA on Monday, and added, "Also the current situation and the conflicts in the country do not need advanced and heavy weapons and the clashes are taking place with light arms that Syrians themselves can supply and they don't need Iran or Iraq."

"Iraq is committed to non-intervention in Syria's affairs and there is no evidence to prove transition of weapons via Iraq's soil and air," he added.

Bayati underlined that such claims are merely aimed at thwarting Iraq's innovative and peaceful plans to settle the Syrian crisis, adding, "Certain Arab governments are the main culprits behind continued bloodshed in Syria."

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.

In October 2011, 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 and its western and regional allies have long sought to topple Assad and his ruling system. Media reports said that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups 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.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242042>

- **Russian Newspaper: "Allawi calls Russia to mediate for visiting Iran"**

Baghdad, Sep 24 (AIN) – The Russian "Moscow Newspaper" revealed that "The head of the Iraqiya Slate, Ayad Allawi, requested Russia to mediate for visiting Iran."

The Iranian Fars News Agency quoted the Moscow Newspaper as stating "Allawi's visit to Moscow was due to his feeling that

he is losing the public support as a result for his support for the Fugitive Vice-President, Tariq al-Hashimi."

"The Russian Newspaper pointed out that Allawi insisted to visit Iran by sending his personal envoy, Mohammed Khoshnow, to meet the Iranian officials," the Iranian News Agency added, assuring that "Allawi requested from Russia to interfere to make his visit to Iran possible to correct his political performance for the media outlets."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19231

2. IRAN

- **Commander: IRGC Navy Closely Monitoring US Wargames in Persian Gulf**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The naval forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) are constantly monitoring the US-led naval wargames currently underway in the Persian Gulf, Commander of the IRGC Navy Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi announced.



"Americans' activities are under our (IRGC Navy) constant watch any moment," Fadavi said, adding that the US has only been joined by Britain, France, Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the wargames and the rest of the 20 countries which are said to be accompanying Washington forces in the drills are only attending the meetings and conferences related to the wargames.

To signal IRGC's constant monitoring of hostile moves in the region, the commander mentioned that "based on our latest assessments, 64 US vessels are present in the region, and the Americans claim that 20 of these vessels are participating in the drills."

He added that 6 British, one French, 2 Japanese and 2 Emirati ships are also present in the wargames.

The US minesweeping exercises began on September 16 and will last by September 27.

Earlier, Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari stressed Iran's intelligence supremacy over US moves in the region, and noted that Iran is well informed of the details of the US naval moves in the region.

"We are well aware of the exact number and the position of the US surface vessels, aircrafts, submarines and minesweeping warships in the region," Sayyari underscored on Friday.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242124>

- **Egyptian Minister Hopes for Immediate Resumption of Ties with Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Egyptian Minister of Antiquities Mohamed Ibrahim Ali underscored the abundant cultural and civilization commonalities between Tehran and Egypt, and expressed the hope that relations between the two Muslim states would be resumed in the near future.



"God willing the relations (between Iran and Egypt) will be resumed soon," Ibrahim Ali told FNA on Tuesday.

He referred to the tourism potentials and cultural commonalities of Iran and Egypt, and invited Iranian tourists to visit his country's ancient and historical places.

"There had been tight relations between the Iranian and Egyptian civilizations in ancient times," Ibrahim Ali underlined, adding that the two countries should revive their age-old ties.

After the collapse of Hosni Mubarak's regime, the Iranian and Egyptian officials voiced their interest in the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi officially invited the then Egyptian counterpart Nabil Al-Arabi to pay a visit to Tehran.

Later, the Iranian foreign minister and his former Egyptian counterpart also held a meeting in Bali, Indonesia.

Also, during the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran late August, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Egyptian counterpart conferred on ways to promote the bilateral relations between Tehran and Cairo, and stressed the need for continued consultations in this regard.

In a latest development, Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi in a meeting with Salehi in Cairo earlier this month said that Iran plays an important role in resolving the regional crises, and underlined that Tehran and Cairo should be united in dealing with global challenges.

"When the followers of unrighteousness are united in their unrighteous path, why should not we go united in our right position when dealing with global challenges," Mursi said.

Stressing that Egypt assumes Iran's stability as its own stability, he said,

"There is no problem between Iran and Egypt."

The Egyptian president also underscored the important role of Iran's assistance to the settlement of problems in the region, and announced Cairo's readiness for any kind of regional cooperation with Tehran.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242122>

- **IRGC Tests Anti-Ship Missile Capability in Persian Gulf**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) announced that it has tested its missile capability of hitting large naval vessels in a missile drill in Iran's Southern waters in the Persian Gulf.

Commander of the IRGC Navy Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi said, the IRGC has concluded the final stage of its missile drill in the Persian Gulf, firing four missiles at a mock sea target.

The missiles were fired simultaneously at a sea target as large as a warship and sank it in fifty seconds, Fadavi stated.

He stressed Iran's missile capability, and noted that Iran's missile systems can reach the entire Persian Gulf coastline and beyond where the US bases are.

Elsewhere, the commander said the IRGC Navy plans to hold massive naval drills in the Strait of Hormuz during the current Iranian calendar year (March 2012-March 2013).

Also in July, the IRGC Aerospace Force test-fired a supersonic anti-ship ballistic missile in the last phase of the Payambar-e Azam 7 (The Great Prophet 7) massive missile wargames.

The IRGC units fired several Khalij-e Fars (Persian Gulf) naval missiles at naval targets in the last phase of the wargames.

The IRGC also exercised bombing specified targets by fighter bombers and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).



In early 2011, Iran started the mass-production of the Persian Gulf anti-ship missile which is designed to destroy targets and hostile forces at sea.

The supersonic projectile, which carries a 650-kilogram warhead, is immune to interception and features high-precision systems.

Also on Monday, the IRGC successfully test-fired the home-made Ra'd air defense missile shield on Monday.

A report aired by Iran's state-run TV on Monday evening showed footages of the test-fire during a military exercise by the IRGC Aerospace force.

The footages showed that the missiles, Ta'er (bird), fired by the Ra'd defense system hit a flying target and destroyed it completely.

The IRGC displayed the highly advanced air defense shield during military parades in Tehran on Friday.

According to IRGC Air Defense Unit, the highly-advanced home-made Ra'd (Thunder) air defense system is equipped

with 'Ta'er' (Bird) missiles, which can trace and hit targets 50km in distance and 75,000f in altitude.

Following the parades, Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh told FNA that the Ra'd air defense system has been developed to target aggressive US planes.

"The system has been built in a bid to confront US aircraft and can hit targets 50km in distance and 75,000 feet in altitude," Hajizadeh said.

The production and use of the system can boost Iran's air-defense capabilities in various fields, officials said earlier this month.

IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari had informed last week that his forces had started the production of the Ra'd system.

"The Ra'd air-defense system, which is more advanced than the Buckeye system has recently been developed and is now being mass-produced," Jafari told reporters in a press conference last Sunday.

"Ra'd is ranked as a mid-range radar system," the General said, and continued, "The air-defense system will boost the Islamic Republic's ability to counter aerial threats."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242118>

- **Iran to Sign Contracts on Development of 3 Oil, Gas Fields Soon**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Mohsen Khojasteh Mehr said development contracts of 3 oil and gas fields, worth about 7 billion dollars, will be signed in near future.

Addressing a meeting of high ranking oil industry managers with media representatives, the deputy oil minister for planning and supervision of hydrocarbon resources said, "One aspect of the oil industry strategy includes focusing on exploration in border areas."



"Exploration is underway in surrounding areas of the shared fields, like Yadavaran and Azadegan oil fields," he added.

"In the offshore sector, all exploration activities are concentrated in border areas, while in the onshore sector 67 percent of explorations are underway in border areas," Khojasteh Mehr told the meeting.

Stating that 12 oil and gas fields, including 3 shared and 9 independent oil and gas fields, were discovered last year; the official said accumulated discovered oil and gas reserves stand at 9 billion barrels of oil equivalent.

"In addition, two billion barrels of oil has been discovered in Sardare Jungle oil field in Caspian Sea waters", the official noted.

"Up to now 52 oil and gas formation have been identified in the county and further

information will be announced upon the completion of explanatory activities."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy oil minister said drilling activities had doubled in shared fields, adding that two years ago just 26 drilling rigs were active in shared fields but their number has reached 53 now, showing a great revolution in drilling activities.

During the last visit to the Research Institute of the Petroleum Industry by Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution, oil minister promised to determine situation of all shared oil and gas fields, which subsequently led to signing 11 development contacts, worth 15 billion dollars, in last year.

The situations of 98 percent of shared fields have been determined and the figure rise to 100 percent when it is related to onshore shared fields.

He also said that during the last year shared oil and gas fields' output rose by 20 and 22 percent respectively.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242078>

- **Iranian Offshore Industry to Sign \$14bln Contracts**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Managing-Director of the National Iranian Offshore Oil Company (NIOOC) Mahmoud Zirakchianzadeh said his company is conducting negotiations over several deals worth 14 billion dollars.

Zirakchianzadeh told Shana that the technical and financial aspects of the contracts had been finalized and the necessary procedures were underway to finalize the deals.

He added the contracts dealt with the development of Farzad A, Farzad B, Soroush, Esfandiari, Tosan and Alfa fields.

Referring to the endorsement of an agreement with Petropars Company on the development of Farzad B field, Zirakchianzadeh said, "Petropars has started some executive operations such as preparation of Pre MDP and conducting three-dimensional seismic operations."

"In addition to preparing Pre MDP and conducting 3-d seismic activities, Sehar-1 drilling rig has moved to the Farzad A site and has drilled more than 2 thousand meters since entering the site."

He stated that the company had reached an agreement with Khatam-ol-Osia Headquarters on development of Tosan and Alfa fields, and said the agreements are about conducting basic studies on the development plan of the fields, making preparations and offering technical and financial suggestions.

"The NIOOC is the second biggest subsidiary of NIOC in terms of development of oil and gas fields and will rank the first in terms of signing development contracts within next two years," Zirakchianzadeh said.

Last year the company signed six billion dollars of contacts, part of which was related to the development plans and another part to modernization of facilities.

The NIOOC was established in 1980 to develop oil and gas fields in the Persian Gulf. It covers an area which is divided to Bahregan, Kharg, Sirri, Lavan, Qeshm and Kish regions.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242074>

- **Israel no longer a threat to Iran: IRGC deputy commander**

TEHRAN, Sept. 23 (MNA) -- The deputy commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has said that the Zionist regime no longer constitutes a threat to Iran.

“Today, we have crossed the boundary of concern about the threats of the Zionist regime,” Brigadier General Hossein Salami stated in an interview published on Sepah News, which is the official website of the IRGC, on Sunday.

“Israel has bitter memories of confrontation with regional (allies) of the Islamic Republic during the wars of the past decade. Now, how can it be a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran?”

Salami added, “Only a single infantry battalion of ours would be able to break the back of this regime, which only has a width of 24 kilometers in some areas, in a day.”

“Iran has reached such a zenith that an attack on it is no longer put on the political agenda of the superpowers. The level of deterrence has risen to the extent

that the idea of starting and imposing another war no longer exists in the mind and belief of all the major powers, and Islamic Iran is a known great power,” he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the IRGC deputy commander stated, “Our doctrines are defensive at the level of (grand) strategy, but our strategies and tactics are offensive. This means that we will not start a war, but if someone starts a war against us, we will be all offensive and will attack relentlessly and will not stop.”

“Our missile capability (is such that we) can target and largely destroy any enemy base in the region at any distance. We have the expertise to manufacture all modern missiles,” he added.

Israel’s bark is worse than its bite: Majlis speaker

Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that the isolated Zionist regime has been left with no option but to shout and threaten Iran.

Commenting on the wave of the Islamic Awakening rolling across the Muslim

world, Larijani stated, “The dictators subservient to Western countries have fallen, and more important than this is Israel’s isolation, and now, Israel has no other option but to shout to save itself and say, ‘I am alive.’”

The fact that Israel has been isolated is a “very important” issue, Larijani said, adding, “It is threatening Iran to stabilize its situation.”

www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1703430

- **Iran will defend itself if attacked: Ahmadinejad**

TEHRAN, Sept. 24 (MNA) - President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in a U.S. television interview that Iran will defend itself if attacked by Israel, Bloomberg reported.

Ahmadinejad has visited New York to attend the annual United Nations General Assembly meeting.

“The response of Iran is quite clear, I don’t even need to explain that,” Ahmadinejad said in an interview with CNN, according

to a transcript. “Any nation has the right and will indeed defend herself.”

“The Zionists are very much, very adventuresome, very much seeking to fabricate things,” Ahmadinejad said, according to CNN. “I think they see themselves at the end of the line, and I do firmly believe that they seek to create new opportunities for themselves and their adventurous behaviors.”

Ahmadinejad said in an interview with the Washington Post that Iran wants to continue negotiations with world powers over its nuclear program and does “not take very seriously” Israel’s threats.

The president also said he doubts Americans want war with Iran.

“I don’t believe so,” he said. “I believe the people of the U.S. are peace-loving people.”

On an anti-Islam which mocks Prophet Muhammad (S), Ahmadinejad said, “Fundamentally, first of all, any action that is provocative, offends the religious thoughts and feelings of any people, we condemn.”

"Likewise, we condemn any type of extremism. Of course, what took place was ugly. Offending the Holy Prophet is quite ugly. This has very little or nothing to do with freedom and freedom of speech. This is the weakness of and the abuse of freedom, and in many places it is a crime. It shouldn't take place, and I do hope the day will come in which politicians will not seek to offend those whom others hold holy," Ahmadinejad said.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1703990>

- **Mehdi Hashemi is sent to prison**

TEHRAN, Sept. 24 (MNA) – Mehdi Hashemi, the son of Expediency Council Chairman Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who arrived in Tehran late on Sunday, attended the court hearing on Monday.

After his arraignment, he was sent to prison.

He faces charges of inciting unrest after the 2009 presidential election.

He returned home after spending three years in Britain.

Faezeh Hashemi, the daughter of Rafsanjani, was also put in prison on Saturday as she had been sentenced to a six-month jail under charges of spreading propaganda against the system.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1704179>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Palestinian leaders dismiss Barak's proposal for partial withdrawal**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Palestinian leaders on Monday dismissed a proposal by Israel's defense minister suggesting a partial withdrawal from the occupied West Bank.

Ehud Barak told the newspaper Israel Hayom that in the absence of peace talks, smaller illegal settlements in the West Bank should be evacuated, with the major settlement blocs remaining under Israeli control.



Barak's proposal was swiftly shot down by Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor, who said the army will remain in the West Bank until a peace agreement is reached.

PLO executive committee member Wasel Abu Yousef said Barak had regurgitated an old plan proposed by former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and that the proposal would be rejected by the Palestinian people and their leaders.

"It seems as if they're talking about a temporary state based on small separated areas whose valleys are controlled by Israel ... they are avoiding talking about Jerusalem and the wall which is confiscating Palestinian lands and giving legitimacy to settlements," Abu Yousef told Ma'an.

The timing of the plan shows Israel is trying to avoid accountability for shutting off all other political horizons and to damage the PLO's efforts to upgrade Palestine's status at the UN, Abu Yousef said.

The Israeli government realizes that the Palestinian bid to be accepted as a non-member state by the UN General Assembly is serious, and that the PLO has the full support of the non-aligned movement and Arab, European and African states, he added.

Secretary-General of the Palestinian People's Party Bassam al-Salhi said Barak's proposal was a continuation of Israel's expansionist project, started in 1948, which aimed to destroy the possibility of a Palestinian state.

Palestinians insist on an end to Israel's withdrawal from all land occupied in 1967, al-Salhi told Ma'an.

"This plan doesn't change the reality of the Israeli occupation, which is trying to enhance its power and improve its image in the world and burden Palestinians with more issues," he added.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=523172>

- **Israel seals West Bank, Gaza for Jewish holiday**



BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Israel will impose a general closure on the West Bank and Gaza for two days from midnight Monday, the Israeli army said Monday evening.

All crossings in and out of the West Bank and Gaza will close from midnight Monday until midnight Wednesday due to the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur, the army said in a statement.

Those in need of medical attention or humanitarian aid will need the authorization of Israel's civil administration to pass, the army added.

Israel routinely imposes closures on the occupied West Bank during Jewish holidays.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=523168>

- **EU's Ashton Calls on All Donors to Help PA**

BRUSSELS, September 25, 2012 (Wafa) - European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton Monday called upon all donors to step in and help the Palestinian Authority, stressing the importance of moving forward on all political issues and addressing the dire economic situation and security issues of concern to both Palestinian and Israeli parties.

In a statement issued in Brussels, following the meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Palestine (AHLC) on Sunday in New York, and the meeting of the AHLC Chair in Norway with the representatives of the donor community on Monday, Ashton reaffirmed the EU's position on the need to move urgently towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the interest of stability, prosperity, lasting peace and security in the region.

She stressed that the achievements in building Palestinian state institutions as well as the economic viability of PA are crucial in this context.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20734>

- **PCBS: Deficit in Current Account amounts to over \$6M in Q2, 2012**

RAMALLAH, September 24, 2012 (Wafa) – The deficit in the current account amounted to \$6.397 million, 29.5% of the GDP at current prices for the 2nd quarter of 2012, with an increase of 4.0% compared to the 2nd quarter 2011, Monday said a report published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics report on Monday.

The report said that the deficit in the trade balance of goods amounted to \$1,237.5 million (46.0% of the GDP in current prices); the deficit increased by 4.0% compared with the year 2011.

It said the deficit in services balance amounted to \$90.9 million reflecting an increase of 20.9% compared with the year 2011.

The increase in the deficit of services balance was caused by the shrink of the exports in transportation services, in addition to the increase of the imports in personal and cultural services and government services.

The surplus in income balance increased by 0.9% compared with the year 2011 and amounted to \$278.0 million due to surplus in compensations of employees working in Israel, which reached \$251.2 million, it said.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20731>

- **Newspapers Review: Security Discovers Hamas Prison in West Bank, say Dailies**

RAMALLAH, September 24, 2012 (Wafa) – The discovery of an underground structure in the northern West Bank village of Ureef, south of Nablus, which the Palestinian security said was used as an underground prison for Hamas, dominated the front page of Monday's Palestinian Arabic dailies.

The top front page story in al-Hayat al-Jadida highlighted this story quoting officials and security officers in Nablus saying the prison was discovered following the arrest of some Hamas operatives in the area. It said the prison was underground and a tunnel from a nearby restaurant leads to it. It also has electric outlets, water, satellite, and communication equipment.

The security said they found also hundreds of thousands of US dollars, flags, leaflets, videos, documents and military uniforms for Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas.

The main front page story of al-Quds highlighted reports that Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal has decided to step down as head of the movement, which he led since 1996. The Reuters story quoted Hamas officials in Gaza that Meshaal has informed them that he does not intend to stay in his position any longer and that they should look for an alternative to lead the movement.

The story quoted the officials as saying that Meshaal's decision came in frustration over the way Hamas leaders in

Gaza operate and their refusal to follow his lead. It said Ismail Haniyeh, who heads Hamas in Gaza, is a likely successor.

Al-Ayyam decided to focus on a government decision to control prices of basic commodities. It quoted the minister of economy as saying that prices of eight commodities will be set including bread, sugar, milk, eggs, rice, chicken, oil and meat.

The discovery of the body of a 10-year-old boy, declared missing few days earlier in the Jenin area and killed and buried in the ground, was reported on the front page of the three dailies.

The papers also said that two prisoners, who have been on hunger strike for more than three months, ended their strike after reaching a deal with the Israeli authorities to release them. One prisoner, Samer al-Barq, will be sent to Egypt after his release, which could be any day now; the second, Hasan Safadi, won a court decision for his release at the end of his administrative detention term, which will be October 29.

Al-Quds had a story on the front page saying that West Jerusalem municipality staff handed 18 demolition orders to Palestinian residents in Silwan, Shufat and Wadi al-Joz.

The meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of donor countries to the Palestinian people was highlighted on the front page of the dailies.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20729>

- **Kadima MKs want Olmert comeback, Left shuns him**

A court's decision to not sentence the former prime minister to jail time raises the prospects of a political return.

Ehud Olmert acquitted Photo: Yonatan Zindal / Pool

The Jerusalem District Court's decision not to sentence former prime minister Ehud Olmert to jail time reverberated across the political spectrum Monday, as Kadima MKs expressed hope he would come back to politics and other legislators slammed him.

The court sentenced Olmert to a one-year suspended sentence and fined him NIS 75,300 after he was convicted of breach of public trust in the Investment Center Affair. Had Olmert been sentenced to even three months of community service, it could have prevented him from making a political comeback, but the suspended sentence is not expected to create a legal problem for him to run for the next Knesset.

What does temporarily prevent Olmert from returning to politics is his ongoing Holyland corruption trial and the expected State Attorney's Office appeal to the Supreme Court of his acquittal in the Talansky affair.

Olmert's spokesman Amir Dan said Monday that a return to politics was not on the former prime minister's agenda. Olmert himself said following his acquittal of most of the charges against him that he "had no intention of entering political activity."

But such denials did not stop Kadima MKs from expressing hope that he would return to the leadership of the party and save it from its predicted demise.

Olmert's associates said he had received congratulatory phone calls from nearly all the MKs in Kadima, including party chairman Shaul Mofaz.

"Olmert could take back the party in the middle of the night while we are all asleep if he wanted to," one Kadima MK said.

Mofaz's associates downplayed the calls for an Olmert comeback and said many MKs in the party had earned a reputation as big talkers who didn't follow through when it came to action.

A Smith Research poll that The Jerusalem Post commissioned following Olmert's July 13 acquittal on the key corruption charges against him found that his comeback would have a huge impact on the political map. The poll found that if Olmert returned to the helm of Kadima, the party would win 17 seats, compared to just eight under Mofaz.

Were Olmert to form a new centrist party that included Kadima and Yesh Atid Party leader Yair Lapid, it could win 30 seats, compared to 27 for Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud, according to

the poll. The new party would take away mandates from Likud and Labor and could potentially form the next government.

Likud MK Danny Danon called upon Kadima to "put away the champagne." He said that not even Olmert could "prevent their Titanic from sinking."

Leaders of parties on the Left that compete with Kadima did not express enthusiasm about a potential Olmert comeback.

Meretz leader Zehava Gal-On said that Olmert's actions were a lethal blow to public confidence in the political system.

"He cannot return to politics," Gal-On said. "The fact that the court did not give him jail time doesn't change the Mark of Cain that clings to Olmert."

Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich said the real headline should be that for the first time in the country's history, a prime minister had been convicted and sentenced.

“Clean hands are a fundamental requirement for public service,” Yacimovich said.

“Olmert is corrupt and is a convicted felon. He speaks in arrogance and blindness as if he had been cleared. His crime, conviction, arrogance and lack of shame are further proof that Olmert should not have been prime minister in the first place.”

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=286152>

- **White House defends position on Israel, Iran**

WASHINGTON – The White House defended itself Monday from GOP criticism that US President Barack Obama was minimizing Israel’s concerns on Iran and downgrading its status as one of America’s closest allies.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney stressed that Israel was indeed America’s “closest ally in the region” and that the US shared Jerusalem’s concerns about Iran.

Related:

Video: Mitt Romney lambastes 2-state solution

Obama to address UN in wake of mounting tensions

In a 60 Minutes interview Sunday night, Obama responded to interviewer Steve Kroft’s question about whether Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was pressuring him to act more aggressively on Iran, by saying, “When it comes to our national security decisions, any pressure that I feel is simply to do what’s right for the American people. And I’m going to block out any noise that’s out there.”

He continued, “I feel an obligation – not pressure, but obligation – to make sure that we’re in close consultation with the Israelis on these issues, because it affects them deeply. They’re one of our closest allies in the region, and we’ve got an Iranian regime that has said horrible things that directly threaten Israel’s existence.”

The campaign of GOP presidential challenger Mitt Romney quickly jumped on the statement, calling Obama’s comments “the latest evidence of his chronic disregard for the security of our

closest ally in the Middle East,” in the words of spokeswoman Andrea Saul.

[Click here for special JPost coverage](#)

Virginia Republican Eric Cantor, majority leader of the House of Representatives, charged that in the interview, Obama “downplayed the Jewish state’s concern over Iran’s march to a nuclear weapon as ‘noise.’” Meanwhile, Democrats fired back on Monday.

DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz called some of the Republican attacks on Obama’s statements exactly the kind of noise he was referring to.

“The president was making the following point: That he will not allow election-season political noise to distract him from the serious decisions he must make as commander-in-chief.”

She continued, “That includes protecting the security of our friend and ally Israel and making sure that Iran is never able to obtain a nuclear weapon.”

Asked specifically about Obama’s use of the word “noise,” Carney answered that

“there is obviously a lot of noise around this issue at times. His point was clearly that his objective is to take every step possible to enhance Israel’s security as part of our strong relationship with Israel.”

Asked later whether he believed Netanyahu had inserted himself into American politics, Carney replied with an unequivocal “no” and referred to the prime minister’s own statements denying such intentions in recent interviews on American television.

In his own 60 Minutes interview with Scott Pelley, which aired directly before Obama’s, Romney slammed his opponent for not granting Netanyahu a meeting while the Israeli leader is in the United States for the opening of the UN General Assembly in New York this week.

The president’s decision not to meet with Netanyahu “is a mistake, and it sends a message throughout the Middle East that somehow we distance ourselves from our friends, and I think the exact opposite approach is what’s necessary,” Romney said.

Carney explained the lack of a meeting as a result of the two men not being in New York on the same days.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=286136>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Megaryef: Libya will not be burden**

Libyan leader warns threat from extremists, remnants of Gathafi era are two main threats to Libyan security.

NEW YORK - New Libyan leader Mohamed al-Megaryef on Monday vowed his country would not be a burden to the international community as he held his first face-to-face talks with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

After voicing his condolences again for a militant attack on the US mission in the eastern city of Benghazi in which four Americans were killed, Megaryef said in English: "We will not be a burden."

The two were meeting in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, in the wake of more than a week of violent

protests triggered by an anti-Islam film which saw tens of thousands of demonstrators take to the streets.



US ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens was killed in the September 11 assault on the Benghazi mission, along with three other diplomatic staffers, when the compound came under sustained heavy arms fire for several hours.

"I also seize this opportunity to reaffirm that what happened on 11th of September towards these US citizens does not express in any way the conscience of the Libyan people, their aspirations, their hopes or their sentiments towards the American people," he added, in a softly-spoken speech, mostly through a translator.

He said the attack in Benghazi "was a very painful, huge tragedy, not only for the

American people and the families of the victims, but also for the Libyan people."

"The Libyan people lost a friend, lost someone who was very supportive of them, someone who was very supportive of our revolution and someone who was always there for them."

Clinton told the Libyan leader that she wanted to thank him for his government's efforts "to help find and bring to justice all those responsible for the attack.

"I'd also like to thank the Libyan people for the outpouring of support they have shown to not only Ambassador Stevens, but on behalf of the United States," she said at the start of their talks in an upscale New York hotel.

"Courage has been the defining characteristic of the Libyan people over these last two years," Clinton added.

"Courage to rise up and overthrow a dictator, courage to choose the hard path of democracy, courage to stand against violence and division in the country and the world. Mr President, that kind of courage deserves our support."

After the talks, a senior State Department official said the two sides had reviewed the efforts made to rein in the militias, to deal with shoulder-launched missiles and other excess weapons left over from the era of toppled tyrant Moamer Kadhafi.

Clinton "offered to intensify our support and help for the Libyan government in all of those areas," the official.

Megaryef, who is the head of the national assembly, said there were two main threats to Libyan security -- the threat from extremists, and also from remnants of the Gathafi era.

"Security is their government's absolute highest priority," the US official said, adding they also talked about economic challenges facing Libya as it seeks to diversify away from being dependant on petrochemicals.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54547>

- **Egypt court rules against exclusion: Ex-regime figures can run in polls**

Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court rules members of Mubarak's dissolved party can stand in future parliamentary elections.

CAIRO - Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court on Sunday ruled that members of ousted president Hosni Mubarak's dissolved party can stand in future parliamentary elections.

The court found that any Egyptian citizen should not be deprived of political rights, "including the right to run in legislative bodies," as long as that person meets the candidacy requirements, judicial sources said.

The ruling allows members of Mubarak's former ruling and now disbanded National Democratic Party to be candidates in future parliamentary elections.



In April 2011, just weeks after protests forced Mubarak to resign after three decades in power, the Supreme Administrative Court dissolved the NDP and ordered its funds and property handed over to the government.

The same court on Saturday upheld a June ruling dissolving the Islamist-dominated lower house of parliament.

The People's Assembly was elected late last year, with Islamists winning an overwhelming majority. But on June 14 the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled it invalid, saying there were irregularities in the electoral law.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which ruled after Mubarak was ousted, then dissolved the house. The army was given legislative control, provoking outrage among those wishing to see the military cede power.

On July 8, President Mohamed Morsi, who had risen through the Muslim Brotherhood's ranks, issued a decree ordering the reinstatement of parliament, which the SCC froze two days later.

In August Morsi ordered the surprise retirement of his powerful defence minister and scrapped a constitutional document which handed sweeping powers to the military, in a move some said was aimed at ending the SCAF's power.

Fresh legislative elections are to take place two months after the adoption of a new constitution, which is being drafted by a committee dominated by Islamists and due to be finalised by the end of the year.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54540>

- **Constituent Assembly member resigns over Islamist domination**

Constituent Assembly member Manal al-Tiby resigned on Monday to protest what she described as “the dominance of political Islam over the assembly.”

Tiby said in a statement that she “reached a final decision that there is no point in continuing to be a member of the Constituent Assembly because the final product of the new constitution will not meet the expectations of the majority of Egyptians.”

She added that it has become clear that “the constitution is being drafted... to enable a specific current to establish a religious state so they can seize power.”

Tiby said that her resignation came in accordance with her conscience “as an Egyptian citizen loyal to the revolution.”

The Constituent Assembly was formed by the Islamist majority People’s Assembly, which was dissolved in June. Many have complained that the constitution-writing body is dominated by Muslim Brotherhood members and conservative Salafis.

An administrative court is considering a case requesting the disbandment of the assembly on the grounds that it is not representative of all members of Egyptian society.

The Constituent Assembly and the proposed constitutional articles have been the subject of criticism within and outside of the assembly.

Talaat al-Sadat, head of the Egypt National Party and former member of ousted

President Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party, demanded that President Mohamed Morsy form another Constituent Assembly as soon as possible, due to the fact that the People's Assembly that elected this body has been dissolved.

He added in a statement released by the party on Monday that "this assembly does not represent a consensus between political forces."

Pointing out that the assembly is facing many lawsuits that threaten the completion of its work, Sadat asked, "Why do we continue to waste time in vain?"

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/constituent-assembly-member-resigns-over-islamist-domination>

- **Blogger put on trial for insulting religion**

Blogger Albert Saber Ayyad was referred on Monday to the Marg Misdemeanor Court on charges of defamation of religion. His trial is set to begin on Wednesday.

Ayyad is accused of defaming Islam and Christianity and mocking religious beliefs, rituals and figures.

The prosecution alleges that the defendant "promoted his extremist thoughts in speech and writings by creating web pages, including [the] 'Crazy dictator' and 'Egyptian atheists' [pages]."

The blogger is also accused of posting writings, photographs, audio clips and videos that call for atheism while insulting religions and prophets, as well as mocking fasting during Ramadan and the Christian reverence for the cross.

The prosecution claims that Ayyad published these materials online via social media networks in order to foment discord between Muslims and Christians, and to disrupt national unity.

Eight human rights organizations filed a complaint with the public prosecutor last week alleging that Ayyad was tortured by police at the Marg Police Department during interrogations.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/blogger-put-trial-insulting-religion>

- **Hamas proposes free trade zone in Rafah**

Hamas has prepared a working paper on the establishment of a Rafah joint free industrial trade zone linking Egypt with the Gaza Strip, Palestinian news and information agency WAFA said Monday.

According to WAFA, the area would be supervised by an Egyptian-Palestinian commission that would work to attract investors to the region and give the private sector on both sides of the border the opportunity to build infrastructure and facilities.

The news outlet said the project would promote the development of the surrounding region as well, and that other Arab and friendly countries could be involved in the project. It emphasized that the project should be located close to infrastructure and main roads on the Egyptian side, as well as to nearby sea and land ports.

The paper also proposed that the project's first phase be established over 10,000–20,000 square kilometers, preferably on the Egyptian side of the border.

If established, the free trade zone could become an alternative to the underground tunnels used to smuggle goods from the Egyptian side to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, besieged by Israel since 2007.

Egypt has started to demolish the tunnels after an attack that killed 16 Egyptian security officers early August and might have involved Palestinians, according to press reports.

Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh told Egyptian officials earlier this month that his government was ready to close all tunnels at the border with if border crossings are opened or a free trade zone is established.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/hamas-proposes-free-trade-zone-rafah>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Wahhab wants Lebanese army to target armed Syrians**

Arab Tawhid Movement leader Wiam Wahhab said on Monday evening that President Michel Suleiman should call on the army to target armed Syrians in Lebanon.

“I suggest that Suleiman calls on the Lebanese army to [target] armed Syrians in Lebanon,” Wahhab told MTV.

He added that the Syrian army “will enter Lebanese territory and may shell [certain] positions because there are reports saying there are 9,000 armed men opposed to the Syrian regime in Lebanon.”

Wahhab also commented on the alleged assassination attempt against Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun and said assassination bids must not be dealt with lightly.

“Aoun is targeted every day. But what happened is that [his convoy] was targeted by one bullet. It could be a message [because] assassinations are not carried out [using] one bullet.”

On Saturday evening, Aoun said he was targeted by an assassination attempt after local media reported his convoy came under fire in the southern city of Sidon while returning from a tour in Jezzine.

Asked about the case of ex-Information Minister Michel Samaha who was arrested

in August, Wahhab said that the alleged informer in the case, Milad Kfoury, “got Samaha involved.”

He added that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad “did not receive Samaha for more than a year and a half.”

On August 9, Lebanese security forces arrested Samaha, who has close ties with Syria's embattled regime, for smuggling weapons into Lebanon in a bid to foment terrorist plots.

Two Syrian army officers, including Syrian national security chief General Ali Mamluk, were also indicted by the Lebanese judiciary for their involvement in the plot.

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

- **Israel closes Jordan borders for Jewish festival, says army**

The Israeli army on Monday announced the closing of borders with Jordan for 48 hours during the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur.

All crossings from Israel to Jordan would be shut from Monday at 11:59 pm (2159 GMT) until Wednesday at the same time, said a military statement, on the orders of the head of the army Benny Gantz.

Palestinians would not be allowed to enter Israel during this period, apart from those requiring medical treatment or for humanitarian reasons, the statement said.

Israel systematically closes its borders with Jordan during its main holidays for security reasons.

Israel's observing Jews will mark Yom Kippur with prayers and a 25-hour fast beginning on Tuesday evening.

During the festival, air traffic, public transport and radio and TV programs are stopped.

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

- **Lebanon ready to drill for offshore gas, says energy minister**

Lebanon is technically ready to start drilling for offshore natural gas reserves, its energy minister said on Monday, after

exploration in around half the country's exclusive economic zone was completed.

"Lebanon has now reached the stage where it can start drilling for gas," Gebran Bassil told journalists on a tour to an area in the south of the country where reserves are disputed with Israel and Cyprus.

The country "is technically ready to start issuing permits to enable extraction," he said.

Two companies working with the Lebanese authorities that specialize in three-dimensional exploration have already surveyed around half the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), said Bassil.

They found a large number of gas reservoirs all along the coast.

The area off the southern coast alone contains 12 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, which if extracted "could be enough to cover Lebanon's electricity production needs for 99 years," the minister said.

The country suffers systematic power cuts, because of corruption and damage

to old plants caused by the 1975-1990 civil war.

Gas and oil could also help pay off some of its accumulated debt.

In August 2011, parliament passed a law setting the country's maritime boundary and EEZ, in which it has special rights to explore and exploit natural resources.

Lebanon has been slow to exploit its maritime resources compared with other eastern Mediterranean countries. Israel, Cyprus and Turkey are all much more advanced in drilling for oil and gas.

The country has submitted to the United Nations a maritime map that conflicts significantly with one proposed by Israel.

The disputed zone consists of about 854 square kilometers (330 square miles), and suspected energy reserves there could generate billions of dollars.

Asked whether Israel, which has started exploring an area near the Lebanese border, might try and hinder any exploration by Lebanon, Bassil said it was unlikely.

"Our presence here today proves that there is no threat to our investments or our right to these resources," he said.

There are offshore gas reserves all along the coast, not only in the south, he said, noting drilling could start anywhere once demarcation issues with Cyprus are solved.

Meanwhile, the key obstacle before Lebanon starts issuing licenses is internal.

An administrative committee tasked by the government to develop oil and gas policy has yet to be set up, because of disputes over sectarian quotas.

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

- **Hezbollah's imaginary monsters**

A week ago, the head of Tehran's Islamic army, Mohammad Ali Jaafari, said that Iran's Revolutionary Guards have been sending military advisers to Lebanon and Syria to assist Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad's regime, respectively. The political storm caused by this statement, which

also prompted Lebanese President Michel Suleiman to demand clarification from Tehran, subsided after Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, denied it and blamed the media for mistranslating Jaafari's statement.

I don't think anyone can deny the involvement of the Revolutionary Guards in the creation and militarization of Hezbollah. In the summer of 1982, almost 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards were dispatched to the Syrian-controlled Beqaa region under the pretext of fighting Israel, though they were secretly forming the Party of God. The Guards were used for recruitment, training and indoctrination.

The question is not whether or not there are Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon; it is what exactly they are doing. What are the dynamics of the relationship between the Party of God and its creator? What is the nature of this partnership, and how deep does it go? Can Hezbollah make an independent decision on whether or not to retaliate if Iran got hit by Israel?

Now that the fear of a strike on Iran is increasing by the day, the main question

the Lebanese, including Hezbollah supporters themselves, are asking is whether the party will respond or not.

No one wants a war, and instead of reassuring the Lebanese people, Hezbollah is completely ignoring the issue and focusing its energy on intimidating its local adversaries. The Party of God prefers to keep its supporters in fear of the unknown, hating monsters it has created to keep them worried. Fear will keep them stuck to the party as their only, although increasingly weak, protector.

First the main monster was Israel, then came the Salafists, and now the party's new campaign is against the Shiites who oppose Hezbollah, its doctrines and its politics. It doesn't matter what these Shiites did or said. Hezbollah's media arm takes care of it, and this time it came from the fading Al-Akhbar newspaper and its head, Ibrahim al-Amin, formerly a Communist and now a staunch Hezbollah advocate.

The paper published a series of articles under the spotlight "America's Shiite Tools in Lebanon," criticizing Lebanese Shiite figures for meeting with Americans

diplomats. Their proof: Wikileaks. Of course the question is why publish this spotlight now, knowing that Wikileaks have been out for more than a year.

But the dangerous part is what Amin wrote afterward. In his piece No place for traitors among us, he threatened a number of Shiite figures. “Do they not believe that their links to the US Embassy and their participation in US schemes targeting the Resistance in Lebanon amount to a clear and blatant form of collaboration with Israel?... Perhaps they should know they are being watched and are under observation because of the offenses they committed without batting an eyelid or feeling a pang of remorse. They ought to know that resistance to them will be stepped up, and become stronger than in the past, and that the enemy’s most violent assault yet on the Resistance in the region will result in their being besieged and silenced. Perhaps those who wish them well owe them a word of advice that the days of all-round forgiving-and-forgetting are over.”

So here’s the new monster for Hezbollah supporters to fear. And why? Just because these figures talked to some American

diplomats and did not consider the Americans as enemies. No Shiite is allowed to think differently. Yet Hezbollah and its pundits still criticize sectarian rhetoric in other communities, as they deem the Shiite one rigid, homogenous group.

So back to the question of why now? Because Hezbollah is seriously worried about the drastic decrease of its popularity among the Shiites. It has been losing support since the beginning of the Syrian uprising and also since Hezbollah started showing signs that it cannot properly manage the government it created in 2011. However, the real hit came a few weeks ago when two prominent Shiite clerics in Lebanon, Mohammad Hassan al-Amin and Hani Fahs, issued a joint statement calling on Lebanon’s Shiites to support the popular uprising in Syria.

Hezbollah more than anyone else understands that change comes from within, and the clerics Fahs and Amin enjoy real respect and popularity among the Shiites, even those who support Hezbollah. They were never labeled

Western-backed or March 14-backed or even Saudi-backed.

These clerics and some secular Shiite figures and activists are slowly but surely coming together as one entity that is open to differences. And that's what makes the Party of God afraid.

Fear and hate can sometimes be synonyms, and now Hezbollah has launched a new hate campaign to avoid the important questions people are asking. The Shiite community cares no more for these imaginary monsters. They need to know whether they will have a decent future in their own country or not. The Lebanese, Shiite and not, need to start pressuring Hezbollah to answer the question: What will it do if Iran gets hit? Everything else is a waste of time and energy.

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

6. SYRIA

- **Turkey is 'main loser' in Syria conflict: former IRGC chief**

TEHRAN, Sept. 24 (MNA) – Yahya Rahim Safavi, the former commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, said on Monday that Turkey is the “main loser” of developments in Syria.

So far, the Turkish people have held several demonstrations denouncing the Recep Tayyip Erdogan government's policy toward Syria.

Turkey along with Qatar and Saudi Arabia have openly called for the ouster of the Syrian government and have expressed support for Syrian rebel groups.

“The Turkish people are Muslim, and normally, they oppose Turkey's moves against Syria,” Safavi told Basiji scholars in the city of Ardabil, in the northwestern Iranian Ardabil Province.

He said that Turkey, with a financial support from Arab countries, has turned into a “puppet” of outsiders in the enmity toward the Syrian government.

“However, Turkey is the main loser of the battleground,” noted the senior military advisor to the Supreme Leader.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1704333>

- **Israel army: Syrian mortar shells land in Golan Heights**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Mortar shells fired by the Syrian army landed in the northern Golan Heights on Tuesday, Israel's army said.



"Several mortar shells landed in the Golan Heights causing no damage or injuries. The shells were aimed at villages inside Syria and are part of the ongoing internal conflict," an Israeli army spokeswoman said.

Israel has filed a complaint with UN forces operating in the area, adding that fire from Syria leaking into Israel will not be accepted, the spokeswoman added.

The shells reportedly landed near a Kibbutz and were thought to be aimed at the Syrian village of Jubata al-Khashab, Israeli daily Haaretz reported.

Last week, Israel's military launched a surprise large-scale exercise last week on the occupied Golan Heights, testing its battle readiness amid tensions over Iran's nuclear drive and civil war in Syria.

Israel captured the Golan Heights in a 1967 Middle East war and annexed the area, in a move that was not recognized internationally, in 1981. Most Druze rejected the offer of Israeli citizenship.

In July, Israel said it would block any influx of Syrian refugees into the Golan Heights.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=523228>

- **Syria mediator tells UN he has 'a few ideas' but no plan**



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UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) -- The international mediator on Syria said on Monday he has "a few ideas" but not a full plan on how to end the country's 18-month conflict, which he described as "extremely bad and getting worse."

Lakhdar Brahimi offered that assessment after his first briefing to the UN Security Council since replacing Kofi Annan as the UN-Arab League mediator on Sept. 1. In his first month on the job, Brahimi met with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus and visited refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan.

"I do not have a full plan for the moment, but I have a few ideas," the veteran Algerian diplomat said. "I have agreed with the council I will come back here as soon as possible with more ideas on how we move forward."

"The situation in Syria is extremely bad and getting worse. It is a threat to the region and a threat to peace and security in the world," he told reporters. "There is a stalemate ... but I think we will find an opening in the not too distant future."

Brahimi declined to elaborate.

The United Nations says nearly 20,000 people have been killed in the conflict. More than 250,000 Syrians have fled to neighboring Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, with more than 100,000 of those leaving in August alone.

Council diplomats, speaking on the condition of anonymity, described Brahimi's assessment of the conflict as downbeat, saying that despite government claims it was committed to reform, Damascus was instead seeking to portray the uprising as a foreign conspiracy and return to how things used to be.

"You cannot go back to the Syria of the past," Brahimi said. "Reform is not enough anymore, what is needed is change."

One diplomat said that while Brahimi did not reveal much to the council about his plans, he was "solid" in laying the bulk of the blame for the conflict with Assad's government.

Strong support

While decrying the violence, diplomats offered no new ideas for how to solve it.

"The situation in Syria is grave. We need to do everything we can to end the violence and the killing of so many innocent people," German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told reporters. Germany is president of the council for September.

As Syria spirals deeper into civil war, the Security Council has been paralyzed as Russia and China have blocked three Western-backed resolutions that criticized Assad and threatened sanctions.

Annan blamed the Security Council impasse for hampering his six-month bid to broker peace and leading to his decision to step down. Diplomats have tried to play down expectations for Brahimi's mission and the former Algerian

foreign minister has described the task of brokering peace as "nearly impossible."

In a statement on Monday, the 15-member Security Council expressed grave concern about the situation in Syria and offered its full and strong support to Brahimi.

Diplomats said Brahimi made a plea to the Security Council for strong unified support, saying there could be no progress without it: "You all say you support me individually, why don't you support me collectively? It shouldn't be very difficult."

Westerwelle said former UN Secretary-General Annan's six-point plan for peace in Syria was still relevant.

The plan, which failed to take hold, calls for an end to violence, a Syrian-led political process, access for aid, the release of arbitrarily detained people, freedom of movement for journalists and the freedom to protest peacefully.

Brahimi said it was one of the "elements in my toolbox."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=523165>

- **SNC: We will 'not allow acts of vengeance' on Syria's Alawites**

Syria's main opposition coalition issued a statement on Monday, guaranteeing no vengeance attacks would be carried out against the country's minority Alawite sect, to which President Bashar al-Assad belongs.

"No one should fear the victory of the revolution," said SNC spokesperson George Sabra, a prominent Christian dissident who penned the statement, responding to fears that members of the Alawite sect could suffer sectarian attacks at the hands of armed rebels.

"We tell our Alawite brethren and all the Syrians, we will not allow any acts of revenge or attacks against innocent people who are not implicated in acts of killing or bloodshed," said Sabra.

Assad's regime has blamed terrorists and fundamentalists for violence in Syria since an uprising broke out in March last year.

Over time, the armed insurgency has grown in response to the regime's violent crackdown on dissent.

Among those fighting are some extremist Islamists, and they have helped stoke fears over the shape Syria might take should the regime fall.

Alawites constitute the second-largest sect in Syria, which is made up of a patchwork of religious and ethnic groups.

Around 80 percent of Syrians are Sunni, while around 10 percent belong to Assad's Alawite community, five percent are Christian, three percent Druze and one percent Ismaili.

Faced with the extremism of some elements of the armed opposition, there has been an increasing number of voices from within the revolt in recent weeks, condemning the radicalization of the uprising.

"The state will be for all, and it will provide a real opportunity for reconciliation and for the creation of genuine national unity," Sabra said.

In the statement, Sabra issued a call to "our brothers in suffering and in aspirations" to join the revolt, noting that only those behind the commission of crimes in Syria would be held legally responsible should Assad's regime fall.

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

- **Egypt leader against foreign intervention in Syria**

Morsi reiterates embattled Syrian President has no choice but to leave to fulfill Syrians' will.

UNITED NATIONS - Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi said Monday that he opposes any foreign military intervention in the Syria conflict but believes President Bashar al-Assad must go.

In an interview with PBS television's Charlie Rose ahead of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York, Morsi said the diplomatic quartet of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey could help end the 18-month-old conflict.

"I am against foreign intervention by force in what happens in Syria," Morsi said. "I

do not condone this and I think that it is a big mistake if it happens," he added through an interpreter. "Egypt does not agree to this."

Morsi, a former senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood who became Egypt's first democratically elected president in June, said Arab nations should "support the people of Syria in their march toward freedom.

"President Assad has no choice but to leave," Morsi added. "There is no room for political reform. Change is what the people want, and the will of the people must be respected," he added.

"The regime should have realized that the military solution would not stop the revolution. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and more could follow, so the main thing is to stop the bloodshed."

Morsi said he had brought together officials from Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in a bid to find a solution to the conflict, in which Syrian activists say more than 29,000 people have been killed.

The Syrian government has accused Saudi Arabia and Turkey of arming opposition rebels, while UN experts have said Iran is arming Assad's forces.

"This is the reason why I chose these countries," Morsi said. "You cannot solve the problem without those countries which intervene in the problem. The stakeholders are the ones who sit down together to solve the problem."

The Egyptian leader added that he hoped he could bring together the heads of states of the four nations to discuss the civil war.

Morsi is to speak at the UN General Assembly on Wednesday.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54543>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Kuwait opposition rallies ahead of crucial verdict**

Around 10,000 people cheer loudly as opposition figures called for elected

government, warn against 'politicised ruling'.

KUWAIT CITY - Thousands of Kuwait opposition supporters rallied on Monday ahead of a crucial court ruling on an electoral constituency law amid rising tensions in the oil-rich Gulf state.

Around 10,000 people, who filled the seaside square opposite the parliament building, cheered loudly as opposition figures called for an elected government and warned against what they called a politicised ruling.

"Tomorrow could be the start of a new round of political disputes," warned Islamist MP Jamaan al-Harbash.

The constitutional court is scheduled to rule on Tuesday if the electoral constituency law is in line with the constitution based on a request submitted by the government last month.

"Any politicised verdict could lead to protesters filling the streets... we warn that the court's ruling may take Kuwait into a dark tunnel," stressed opposition MP Khaled al-Tahous.



The latest round of political tension in Kuwait comes after the government last month brushed aside strong objections by the opposition and asked the court to rule if the constituency law was in breach of the constitution.

Opposition leaders had claimed the move was an attempt by the government, controlled by the Al-Sabah ruling family, to unilaterally change the constitutional system in place for a half century.

The law, which divides the OPEC member into five electoral districts, was passed by parliament in 2006 following popular rallies demanding to reform the election process.

Parliamentary elections were held on the basis of the law in 2008 and 2009, in addition to February 2012 which the

constitutional court nullified in June on the grounds of procedural flaws.

The constitutional court will either approve the law as in line with the constitution or declare it unconstitutional which requires to have a new law before the next general election is held.

Speakers also demanded deep political reforms, mainly the formation of a government based on election results.

In an unprecedented verdict, the court scrapped the opposition-dominated parliament in June and reinstated the previous pro-government house elected in 2009 after it was dissolved in December following youth-led protests.

The opposition has demanded the 2009 parliament be swiftly dissolved and fresh elections held.

Kuwait has been rocked by a series of political crises since 2006 during which the government resigned nine times and parliament was dissolved on five occasions.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54545>

- **Saudi firm awarded \$1 billion Morocco solar plant contract**

Saudi-led consortium will build 160 megawatt solar power plant near Ouarzazate, slated for completion in late 2014.

RABAT - Morocco on Monday awarded a Saudi-led consortium a \$1 billion contract to build a 160 megawatt solar power plant, the first in a series of vast solar energy projects planned in the North African kingdom.

A consortium made up of Saudi developer ACWA Power International (95 percent) and the Spanish firms ARIES and TSC (five percent between them), beat off bids from three other groups, one of them led by Italian energy giant Enel.

The bids were evaluated on the basis of price per kilowatt/hour proposed by the competing firms, with the ACWA group offering 1.60 dirhams (0.14 euros), some 27 percent less than the nearest bidder.

Announcing the winners, Mustapha Bakkoury, the head of Morocco's solar energy agency MASEN, said the project would cost nearly \$1 billion (774 million euros), with work to begin at the end of 2012 and slated for completion in late 2014.

Located near the desert frontier town of Ouarzazate and covering 2,500 hectares, the project is the first of two phases that should when completed raise the Ouarzazate plant's generation capacity to 500 megawatts.

The project will be financed with loans from the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, Germany's KfW bank and the French Development Agency.

The German government and the European Commission will also provide grants of 15 million and 30 million euros respectively.

Morocco is aiming to become a world-class renewable electricity producer, and is eyeing the chance to export clean energy to Europe.

The Ouarzazate solar plant is the first of five that Morocco plans to build by 2020 in its southern desert regions, which are expected to add 2,000 megawatts to total generation capacity at an estimated cost of \$9 billion.

The resource-poor country also hopes to add 2,000 megawatts of generation capacity over the same period, from planned wind farms along the coast.

Speaking at Monday's awarding ceremony, the head of the department of water and electricity, Ali Fassi Fihri, described the project as a "great step towards the future."

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54546>

- **Saudis end two-day protest over prisoner release**

Dozens of protesters, activists call for release of their relatives, most of them political prisoners detained without charge, from Tayifa prison near Qassim.

RIYADH - Dozens of Saudis ended Monday a two-day protest held at a prison north of Riyadh to demand the release of their

relatives, most of them political prisoners detained without charge, protesters and activists said.

The protest, a rare occurrence in the kingdom that bans demonstrations, began Sunday outside Tafiya prison near Qassim, just as Saudi Arabia celebrated its national day.

About 60 men, 45 women and 13 children participated in the protest, said activist Rima Jureish, whose husband, a nurse, is being held by authorities.

"The kingdom is celebrating national day even as our husbands are being held without charges and without trial," Jureish said by telephone.

She said her husband "has been detained for more than nine years without charge," adding that she has not seen him in "eight months."

Another protester who asked not to be named said her brother was sentenced to three years in prison and "has served his sentence but remains in jail."

Her other brother, who was also detained by authorities, "died in custody due to lack of care," she said, adding that both her brothers were arrested for their "religious beliefs."

Jureish said the protest came to an end Monday afternoon after authorities informed "us that our message was received and that it was time for us to disperse."

She also claimed that "five protesters were detained."

Rights activists said that most of the detainees in question were "political prisoners with radical religious beliefs."

Saudi authorities could not be reached for comment Monday.

After a wave of deadly attacks in the kingdom by Al-Qaeda between 2003 and 2006, authorities launched a crackdown on the local branch of the group founded by slain Saudi-born Osama bin Laden.

Since then hundreds of Saudis have been detained and arrested, many dozens of

them for their political and religious beliefs.

According to the non-governmental Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), the kingdom is currently holding some 30,000 political prisoners.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54529>

- **Oxfam: Yemeni women worse off after uprising**

Oxfam has warned that women in Yemen are worse off than before the uprising that ousted long-time dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh as a deepening humanitarian crisis in the country shows no signs of abating.

In its latest report, entitled "Still waiting for change," Oxfam said "four out of five" Yemeni women report that their "lives have worsened over the last 12 months."

The findings were based on a series of focus group discussions held throughout the country.

"Although a transition toward democracy is under way, women's hopes for a better life are wearing thin," the report said,

adding that a "deepening humanitarian crisis and conflict are limiting women's role in shaping Yemen's future."

"The humanitarian crisis is making a bad situation worse for women by exacerbating deep-rooted gender inequalities," it added.

According to the report, a quarter of Yemeni women aged between 15 and 49 are "acutely malnourished," with women of "all economic backgrounds" reporting access to food, jobs and security as "their priorities."

Continued conflict and insecurity throughout much of the troubled country is further "exposing women to violence and risking their safety," the report argued.

Though much of Yemen is struggling to cope with the country's dire humanitarian conditions, women and children are often those who suffer the most.

"Women are resorting to desperate and destructive coping mechanisms," said Oxfam. "They are reducing their own food

intake and eating less nutritious food so there is more for their families."

In extreme cases, women have been forced into prostitution.

Yemeni women have been consistently ranked at the bottom in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap in "access to health, education, economic opportunities and decision making at all levels," the aid agency added.

Insufficient international aid is further aggravating the situation.

Global donors made aid pledges worth \$6.4 billion to Yemen at a donors conference earlier this month in the Saudi capital Riyadh, only half of what the Yemeni government was asking for to support its transition phase.

The country's humanitarian needs, meanwhile, are also underfunded.

The United Nations, in partnership with international NGOs, has launched an emergency appeal for \$585 million for 2012. To date, it is only 48.5 percent funded.

Oxfam also called on donor nations to "immediately allocate" already pledged funds and "fully fund" the UN's humanitarian appeal.

A summit on Yemen is to be held on September 27 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York where the country's fragile political transition and humanitarian crisis are expected to dominate the discussions.

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

- **Gunmen kill Yemeni intelligence officer, says security official**

Unidentified gunmen have shot dead a senior Yemeni intelligence officer in the capital Sanaa, the fourth assassination targeting senior officers in just over a month, a security official said.

General Abdullah al-Ashwal "was shot in the stomach by unknown assailants" as he returned home from work late on Monday, said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

He said an initial investigation indicates that "Al-Qaeda was behind the attack."

Ashwal's killing was the fourth of its kind in just over a month.

Colonel Yahya Saleh al-Khalidi, director of the office of the head of Duleimi air base in Sanaa, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen as he left his house on September 6.

A senior officer in customs security, Colonel Yahya al-Munsif, was shot dead two days earlier near his workplace.

And Colonel Yahya Badi in the intelligence Political Security apparatus was murdered by gunmen last month in northeast Sanaa.

Yemen's unity government, created to lead a political transition after the ousting of veteran president Ali Abdullah Saleh in February, is struggling to restructure security forces that have long been dominated by Saleh loyalists.

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

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **200 graduates join Afghan National Police in western province**

HERAT, Afghanistan, Sept. 24 (Xinhua) -- Up to 200 newly- graduated officers joined the Afghan National Police (ANP) after completion of training in the country's western province of Herat, an official said on Monday.

"A total of 200 newly trained police officers were commissioned to the ANP after completion of four-month training period in Adraskan police training center on Monday morning," Fazil Ahmad Khalili commander of the training center told Xinhua.

The determined police officers will be deployed in Herat province, 640 km west of capital Kabul and neighbouring provinces to serve their people, Khalili said, adding "These policemen have been put through a curriculum, which is practical in nature and covers a police skill which has been very important in law enforcement mission in this critical period of time in the country as Afghan police and army are taking the lead in providing security for the country,"

The Afghan government and NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) have stepped up efforts to train and equip Afghan police and army as NATO-led ISAF forces have handed over the security responsibilities of areas where more than 50 percent of the population lives, parts of a process which will run through 2014 when Afghanistan takes over the full leadership of its own security duties from U.S. and NATO forces.

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

- **Afghan, NATO forces keep on pressing militants**

by Farid Behbud, Chen Xin

KABUL, Sept. 24 (Xinhua) -- Afghan army, police and the NATO- led coalition forces have been stepping up pressure on the Taliban and other militant groups across the insurgency-hit country.

In the latest raids on insurgents, the Afghan forces, backed by the NATO-led coalition or International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops, have eliminated 28 Taliban militants within a

24- hour period ending Monday morning, according to the Afghan Interior Ministry.

"Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan army and NDS or intelligence agency, supported by the coalition forces, launched nine joint clean-up operations in Nangarhar, Baghlan, Kandahar, Zabul, Wardak, Ghazni, Ghor, Helmand and Nimroz provinces, killing 28 armed Taliban insurgents and detaining 54 others during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement providing daily operational updates to media.

They also found and seized weapons, the statement said, without saying if there were any casualties on the side of security forces.

The counter-insurgency operations, aiming to dismantle the insurgency's mid-level command structure and its supply line, have been stepped up particularly since early May this year when Taliban launched an annual rebel offensive to target security forces.

In another development, two armed Taliban militants were captured following a search operation by the ANP in Nahrin

district in northern Baghlan province late Sunday.

"The raid was launched to find and arrest Taliban local commanders who have been involved in a string of attacks against government interest in Nahrin and neighboring districts," a senior police official Ghayor Andarabi told Xinhua Monday morning.

Meanwhile, another setback for the Taliban insurgent group was the loss of several local leaders and commanders in southern Helmand and eastern Kunar province on Sunday.

Two insurgents, including a Taliban commander, were killed as aircraft of the coalition forces struck a Taliban hideout in Marawara district of Kunar province 185 km east of capital Kabul on Sunday morning.

"The air raid took place at 09:00 a.m. local time Sunday in Chinar village of Marawara district killing Taliban commander Mullah Bajawar and injuring his deputy namely Hizbullah," police spokesman in the province, Shir Wali told Xinhua.

Another big blow for the militants were killing seven local leaders in another airstrike in Helmand province 555 km south of Kabul also Sunday.

"Based on tips, a warplane with the NATO-led coalition forces carried out an airstrike against a Taliban hideout in Trikh Nawar area of Naway-i- Barakzai district in the wee hours Sunday, killing seven insurgents' leaders, including Mullah Hazrat and Mullah Yasin," police spokesman Farid Ahmad Farhang told Xinhua.

He said the joint forces launched a post-strike assessment operation, detaining the Taliban shadowy governor for the district named Mullah Ahmad Mubarak, who got injured in the attack.

In addition, an Afghan and coalition security forces arrested two militants suspected of being involved in the so-called "green on blue" insider attacks in eastern Logar province on Friday, the ISAF forces confirmed in a statement on Sunday.

Up to 51 U.S. and NATO service members have lost their lives in the insider attacks

since beginning this year, in the attacks when Afghan soldiers or gunmen in their uniform turned their weapons against foreign soldiers with the coalition forces.

"The detained insurgents were known insider attack - or 'green on blue' - facilitators, and planned several operations throughout Logar province. At the time of their arrest, the attack planners were in the advanced stages of preparing for a strike against a coalition base, which included the construction of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), recruitment of insurgent fighters, and the attempted infiltration of Afghan security forces. The security force also detained one suspected insurgent as a result of the operation," the ISAF statement said.

Meantime, the joint forces during launched several operations finding and defusing seven IEDs in eastern provinces within the past 24 hours, the coalition's Regional Command-East confirmed in a statement earlier Monday.

However, the Taliban insurgents, who have been waging a fierce insurgency since their regime was toppled in a U.S.-led incursion in late 2001, have responded

by massive suicide attacks and IED blasts and roadside bombings in the war-ravaged country.

A civilian was killed and three other civilians were wounded when a suicide bomber attempting to launch a suicide bombing against a police unit was shot by police in Shahjoy district of southern Zabul province Sunday afternoon, police chief of the district Sardar Hotak told Xinhua on Monday.

The recent setbacks on militants came as the last of 33,000 U.S. additional forces, which were deployed to Afghanistan in early 2010 with the aim of pushing back the Taliban- led insurgency, have withdrawn from Afghanistan, the U.S. military announced on Friday.

The pull out would not affect the counter-insurgency campaign against the Taliban and other militants across the country, citing Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Gen. Zhair Azimi local Afghan media reported earlier in the day.

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

• Today's Afghan News headlines

UNAMA

24 September 2012 - State-run press publish draft amendments of Election Law; MoI denies media report about illiteracy among majority of the police; 43 militants join the peace process in Faryab and Badghis; No health care center exists in Khwahan district of Badakhshan ; Upper House urges UNSC to put pressure on Pakistan to stop shelling Afghanistan; Afghanistan to host Heart of Asia meeting in New York; Political parties warn against delay in election timetable, demand reforms to electoral system; MoI orders border police to stop imports of Pakistani newspapers.

AFGHAN PRINT NEWS

23 September - State run newspapers, Anis, Eslah, Hewad and Kabul Times dailies published the draft amendments of the Election Law.

Hasht-e-Subh Daily

The Afghanistan Regional Studies Centre condemned a recent anti-Islamic movie,

but called for a halt in demonstrations that the Centre says harm national interests of the country.

Celebrating the International Day of Peace, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) urged the Government to tackle disorder caused by irresponsible armed groups and men. They also called for an increase in the role of women in the Government-led peace process.

Residents, Provincial Council members and health officials in the Khwahan district of Badakhshan expressed concern that there is still no health centre in the district.

Mandegar Daily

Bamyan security officials said that a 25-year-old woman from Shibar was killed after her throat was slit.

The Interior Affairs Ministry rejected a report by the Financial Times that said 92 percent of Afghan police are illiterate. The MoI said that 80 per cent of Afghan police forces can read.

Cheragh Daily

The Attorney-General's Office confirmed that it has received an official letter from the Defence Commission of the Lower House of Parliament in which the Deputy Defence Minister, Inayatullah Nazari, and the chairman of High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, Azizullah Ludin, are accused of involvement in corruption. The Attorney-General's Office assured that it will seriously investigate the allegations.

Weesa Daily

17 militants joined the peace process in Faryab province, said Mawlawi Jamali, a member of the Provincial Peace Council.

Daily Afghanistan

26 members of armed opposition groups joined the peace process in the Qadis district of Badghis province, said the provincial head of the National Directorate of Security.

State Media Editorials

Anis Daily

It is very clear that Pakistan's intelligence network sabotages Afghanistan's current democratic system and interferes in the country's internal affairs by using Taliban as a tool. It does so to promote its own interests. Therefore it is necessary for the Government to prevent Pakistani newspapers from being distributed in the country. The Government should not let foreign countries harm the country's sovereignty.

Private Media Editorials

Hasht-e-Subh Daily

On September 8 the First Vice President, Mohammad Fahim Qasim, delivered a doubtful statement regarding the proper holding of presidential elections. The statement indicates that the Government may not believe it is possible to hold the forthcoming presidential elections on time and as called for by the Constitution. The Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions must stand against this attitude and stress that without elections the legitimacy of the government will be questioned. It is right that some parts of the country lack security, however the past parliamentary and presidential

elections indicated that elections could be conducted in big cities and district centres. It's too early for the Government to yell that it can't hold elections.

Mandegar Daily

Referring to the formation of the "Cooperation Council" of political parties and coalitions of Afghanistan, the editorial says that it seems that the formation of the council could be an answer to the efforts of Government officials who have been trying not to hold the upcoming presidential election. It was earlier said that if the security situation worsens, the election wouldn't be held. But now it is hoped that the political parties and coalitions that formed the new Council can foil anti-election efforts and achieve joint political goals by creating a huge political mobilization to avoid fraud in the elections.

Sarnavesht Daily

President Karzai, leading a high ranking government delegation, left Kabul for New York to participate in the UN General Assembly. While in NYC he will meet with officials from various foreign

governments, including America. He should discuss Government peace talks with the armed oppositions and ask the international community to put pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting militants and sincerely support Afghan peace talks. Those who direct the war in Afghanistan from Pakistan should be pushed to the negotiation table with the support of international community and Pakistan. Otherwise, after the withdrawal of the international troops, the future of Afghanistan may once again its chaotic 1990s past.

Daily Afghanistan

The minimum that the Government can do for assuring transparency in the forthcoming elections is to accomplish primary procedures for the elections. Distribution of elector IDs for residents and conducting a census are the primary issues that should be accomplished. Creating specific mechanisms to prevent fraud and election violations would be another important step by authorities. Reforms are needed in the Election Law, Election Commission and in the whole election system. The actions taken so far

haven't eased the political situation but have increased distrust.

Tolo TV Headlines

The Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions, comprised of about 20 political parties and coalitions, warned that any change or delay in the 2014 presidential elections will lead to a serious crisis. The Council called for reforms and amendments to the electoral system and the election law. They also blamed the Government and responsible organs for recklessness in this regard. They warned that a delay of the presidential election will mean the failure of the Bonn process.

On Sunday Senators urged the United Nations Security Council to assess Afghanistan's complaint against cross-border shelling by the Pakistani military into Afghanistan. The Senate chairman, Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, urged the UN Security Council to put diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. Senators urged the Government to increase pressure on the international community. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs once again called for an immediate and complete end to Pakistani attacks.

The newly elected Interior Minister, Mujtaba Patang, said that his ministry was planning new measures to prevent Pakistani cross-border attacks into border areas. He stressed the need for more border police to prevent these attacks. He also spoke about measures to reduce insider attacks.

The Interior Ministry ordered border police in Nangarhar not to allow Pakistani daily newspapers to enter Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the members of Provincial Council welcomed the interior Ministry's attempt and said it will prevent Pakistan from exporting its cold war into the country. It is said that these newspapers, like Wahdat, Jirga, Khabarona, Mashreq and Express, have been writing in favor of Pakistan and the Taliban.

A number of students at the Peace Martyred Burhanuddin Rabbani University staged protests near parliament on Sunday and demanded that the name of their university be changed back to Kabul Education University. They said the name change has created political problems. MP's urged protesters to avoid violence.

A festival of documentaries and films made by Afghan was held in Herat. 32 films from various provinces were screened. The films Parnian and Seya wa Rangeen were chosen as best films and Fatima Hussaini was selected as best actress and Mohammad Ibrahim was selected as best actor.

Ariana TV Headlines

Speaking at a press conference, the Deputy Spokesperson of the Foreign Affairs Ministry said the ministry is hoping that the United Nations Security Council would include the Afghan Foreign Affairs Minister's complaint regarding Pakistan's rocket attacks at the top of its agenda.

On Sunday President Karzai left for New York to attend the 67th meeting at the United Nations General Assembly. It is said that President Karzai would express his concern regarding Pakistan's rocket attacks.

The Upper House of Parliament supported the Foreign Affairs Minister, Zalmai Rassoul, who complained about Pakistan's continued rocket attacks on Afghanistan's eastern provinces. The Minister was

addressing the Security Council when he made those remarks.

Nearly 20 political parties and coalitions formed a council called the “Cooperation Council”. Members of said that holding a transparent presidential election in 2014 and bringing amendments to the Independent Election Commission (IEC) were necessary. They added that the upcoming election should be held in accordance with the Constitution. They warned that any delay in the holding of the election would be dangerous for the people and would lead to a series of crises.

Local anti-Taliban forces in the Andar district of Ghazni killed 20 Taliban militants, including Pakistani militants. The commander of the local forces complained about the lack of Government assistance.

In a three-day military operation police killed 48 Taliban commanders in the Marjah, Nad Ali, Nawa and Sangin districts of Helmand.

A Chinese delegation paid a visit to Kabul on Sunday. The delegation and Afghan officials signed the Afghanistan-China

Strategic Agreement. They also signed mutual security and economic cooperation pacts.

President Karzai conferred medals to officials of the Presidential Palace’s Press Office. The officials include Siamak Herawi, deputy head of the press office, and Mohammad Fahiq, a prominent journalist.

Shamshad TV Headlines

The Washington Post recently reported that Washington and Islamabad are secretly working on a joint plan, based on which some Taliban officials would be pushed into the reconciliation process in Afghanistan and Pakistan would be given a major role to play in Afghanistan’s future.

Referring to the anti-Islam movies that mocked Prophet Mohammad, the Mahmood Tarzi Think Tank said that every Afghan has the right to demonstrate, but demonstrations shouldn’t be violent in order to avoid the interference of regional countries’ intelligence network.

The Interior Affairs Ministry ordered border police officials in eastern provinces

to prevent the distribution and import of Pakistani newspapers and magazines that have articles that could be considered anti-Afghan Government and anti-police.

Students of the Education University staged a demonstration for the second day to protest the re-naming of their university. The students asked the Lower House of Parliament to intervene since the university is an academic institution and does not belong to a political party.

The Upper House of Parliament asked the international community to press Pakistan harder to stop lobbing rockets into Afghanistan's border areas.

The Deputy Spokesperson of the Foreign Affairs Ministry said that at a sideline meeting at the United Nations Security Council's meeting in New York, Afghan officials would host a meeting that would be attended by officials of the 15 "Heart of Asian" countries. The meeting will focus on outcomes of the Istanbul Process and on the measures recently taken by the Afghan Government.

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

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