MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries	Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset
The Restructuring Proces of Iraq	Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci
Energy Security	Enerji Güvenliği
Economy News	Ekonomi Haberleri
Peace Process	Barış Süreci
Ethnic and Secterian Groups	Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar
Non State Actors	Devlet-dışı Aktörler
Relations with the West	Batı'yla İlişkiler

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN
15 JANUARY 2013
NO: 1530

1. IRAQ 2

- Iraq frees prisoners in gesture to ease Sunni protests 2
- Mosul criticizes "Maliki's demonstration" and threatens armed disobedience 3
- Iqbal condemns assassination of Jubour chieftain in Mosul 3
- Turkish army strikes multiple targets in northern Iraq in cross-border air operation 4
- Kurdistan Region foils six attacks of the "Islamic State of Iraq" in Erbil 5
- U.S. firms to help Iraq modernize port at Basra (WorldTribune) 6
- Iraq frees more than 300 prisoners 6

2. IRAN 8

- Removal of anti-Iran sanctions must top agenda in P5+1 talks: Iran MP 8
- Iran commemorates nuclear scientist on third anniversary of assassination 9
- Iran plans to phase out dollar, euro in foreign trade: Econ. min. 11
- Reshadat oil field output to hit 22k bpd, Iranian official says 12
- Iran's NIGC bids for Turkey gas distributor 13

3. SYRIA 14

- Syrian PM due in Tehran on Tuesday: Iran FM spokesman 14
- Syria bombs rebels bases in Damascus suburbs 15

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE 18

- UN concerned over Israeli plan 18
- Palestinian shot by Israeli forces dies in Gaza 19
- If reelected, PM likely to meet Obama in March 20
- Gaza man shot near border; IDF denies involvement 21

5. AFRICA and EGYPT 23

- Deadly train crash kills Egyptian soldiers 23
- Egypt court orders retrial for Mubarak 24
- France keeps up Mali air strikes, African troop plan advances 26
- UK delegation assures return of Mubarak assets, denies inaction 29
- Protests against work, living conditions sweep across nation 32

6. JORDAN and LEBANON 33

- Protesters pelt eggs, stones at French embassy in Beirut 33

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA 34

- US allegation of Iran's interference in Yemen, unfounded: Iranian MP 34
- Bahrain anti-regime protesters hit Manama's bazaar 36
- Saudi replaces governor of oil-rich province 37

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN 38

- Pakistan protest continues as deadline passes 38

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
Tel: +90(312)4302609 Fax: +90(312)4303948 orsam@orsam.org.tr

1. IRAQ

- **Iraq frees prisoners in gesture to ease Sunni protests**

By Suadad al-Salhy

BAGHDAD | Mon Jan 14, 2013 (Reuters) - Iraq's government has released more than 300 prisoners held under anti-terrorism laws as a goodwill gesture to try to appease Sunni Muslim demonstrators who are staging protests against Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Three weeks of demonstrations, mainly in Sunni-dominated Anbar province, have evolved into a tough challenge for the Shi'ite premier, increasing worries that Iraq could slide back into the sectarian confrontation of its recent past.

Officials said a ministerial committee had freed 335 detainees whose jail terms had ended or whose cases had been dismissed for lack of evidence. Sunni leaders say security forces use terrorism laws to unfairly target their sect.

Dozens of prisoners in yellow Iraqi correctional department uniforms waited surrounded by guards as women in traditional robes and old men tried to catch a glance of detainees to see whether relatives were among those released.

"In name of the Iraqi State, I apologize to those who were arrested and jailed and were later proven to be innocent," said Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani, a senior Iraqi Shi'ite figure heading the committee.

Detainee releases are just one demand from Sunni protesters. Many are also calling for Maliki to step down, an end to a campaign to track down former members of Saddam Hussein's outlawed Baath party, and for an amnesty law

http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/14/us-iraq-protests-idUSBRE90D0OZ20130114

- **Mosul criticizes "Maliki's demonstration" and threatens armed disobedience**

Shafaq News, Jan 14 / Demonstrators in Nineveh threatened on Monday from armed disobedience if the government insisted on its position , while criticized the supporting demonstration of Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki that took place yesterday.

Haitham al-Abadi, one of the organizers of Mosul's demonstration in Ahrar square said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "we threaten of civil disobedience after the deadline given for the Iraqi Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki unless government respond to our demands", criticizing "Nineveh Operations Command, which facilitated yesterday's demonstration supporting Maliki ".

Abadi threatened that "the civil disobedience would be followed by an armed disobedience led by the demonstrators if the government didn't respond to their demands."

Hundreds of demonstrators in Ahrar square in the central of Mosul in Nineveh province gathered on Sunday, marking the start of the countdown to their 72 hours deadline that they give to the government so that It would respond to their requests, while renewed their threat of civil disobedience if it refused to respond, they demanded the rest of the Iraqi provinces to support their claims.

http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4748-mosul-criticizes-qmalikis-demonstrationq-and-threatens-of-armed-disobedience-.html

- **Iqbal condemns assassination of Jubour chieftain in Mosul**

Baghdad, Jan 14 (AIN) -MP Mohamed Iqbal of the Wasat Alliance within the Iraqiya Slate condemned the assassination of the chieftain of Jubour tribe, Mohamed Tahir Abed Rabah, stressing that "This act comes within the series of targeting the moderate national voice in Nineveh province."

Iqbal said in a statement received by AIN "We would like to present our condolence to the late chieftain's family," noting that "The assassination of the martyr clearly indicates that the approach of Iraq's opponents lies in belittling the Iraqis' lives to satisfy the desire of revenge and hatred they bear in their sick selves."

He called on "Nineveh people to preserve the national unity and show solidarity to safeguard bright future for their province and achieve the goals they demands for."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26629:iqbal-condemns-assassinating-jubour-chieftain-in-mosul-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Turkish army strikes multiple targets in northern Iraq in cross-border air operation**

Tuesday,January 15 2013,

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) performed a cross-border air operation earlier today in northern Iraq after an infiltration attempt by a large group of outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) members from Zap camp across the Turkish border, Doğan news agency has reported.

After the information was received, the 2nd Air Forces Command sent two observation planes to the region.

Six F-16 jets took off from the 8th Main Jet Base, passed over the southeastern district of Hakkari and bombarded 18 different targets in the Zap, Haftanin and Metina regions.

This is the first cross-border operation by TSK in 12 days, according to the officials.

The Zap area, a mountainous snow-bound region near the Turkish border in northern Iraq, hosts a major PKK base and training camp.

TSK has not yet confirmed the operation.

http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-army-strikes-multiple-targets-in-northern-iraq-in-cross-border-air-operation.aspx?pageID=238&nid=39055&NewsCatID=341

- **Kurdistan Region foils six attacks of the "Islamic State of Iraq" in Erbil**

Shafaq News, Jan 14 / Kurdistan Region announced on Monday that it has foiled a plan of a group linked to the Islamic State of Iraq , the local wing of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The Security Directorate (Ashayesh) in Erbil said in a statement sent for "Shafaq News" via e-mail that "we received information about the intention of the group called the Islamic State of Iraq to enter explosives to Erbil that includes roadside bombs to carry out terrorist operations inside the city."

Ashayesh added, "After cautious monitoring that started since 5 January on this Zorkzrao checkpoint (South Erbil , the road leading to Makhmour district) , a terrorist was arrested inside a car in possession of 6 magnetic bombs as he was intending to enter it to Erbil."

Magnetic bombs are locally called roadside bombs as it would be often placed under the car of the targeted person.

The Security Directorate noted that the detainee named, Maan Hamad Mohammed al-Ramly is of inhabitants of Hegela area of Salahuddin province.

http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4752-kurdistan-region-foils-six-attacks-of-the-qislamic-state-of-iraqq-in-erbil.html

- **U.S. firms to help Iraq modernize port at Basra (WorldTribune)**

BAGHDAD, Jan 14 — Iraq has selected a U.S. consortium to modernize the nation's leading port.

The government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has signed a $14 million contract for the modernization of a port in the southern province of Basra.

Under the 10-year accord, the consortium, led by North America Western Asia Holdings, would construct a container yard in one of 14 berths in the 93-year-old Maqal Port on the Shatt Al Arab waterway.

"Modernizing Maqal Port is one step in Iraq's greater vision to improve and expand our country's shipping and port capabilities," Iraqi Transportation Minister Hadi Al Amiri said.

Under the contract, the consortium would dredge Shatt Al Arab — which leads to the northern Gulf — to at least nine meters to accommodate deep-water vessels.

North America, led by a former U.S. Defense Department official, would work with other American firms, Triton Container International and Marmon Crane Services.

http://www.worldtribune.com/2013/01/14/u-s-firms-to-help-iraq-modernize-port-at-basra/

- **Iraq frees more than 300 prisoners**

The Iraqi government has released more than 300 prisoners held under the country's anti-terrorism law.

"In name of the Iraqi State, I apologize to those who were arrested and jailed and were later proven to be innocent," Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani said on Monday.

A ministerial committee had been set up to decide on the release of 335 detainees who had served their jail terms or deserved acquittal due to lack of evidence.

The measures was seen as goodwill gesture in a bid to ease protests against Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and head off a feared sectarian strife.

Earlier in the day, hundreds of demonstrators rallied in northern Iraq to express their support for al-Maliki and defend his government's plans.

Demonstrators held up posters of the prime minister in Mosul -- situated some 400 kilometers (250 miles) northwest of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad -- on Sunday and chanted slogans in support of Maliki's policies and his attempts to maintain national unity.

Iraq has been the scene of anti-government demonstrations since December 23, 2012, when the bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi were arrested on terrorism-related charges.

Demonstrators allege that the arrests were made on sectarian grounds and demand an end to anti-terrorism laws. But the government says it is up to the parliament to decide on abolishing those laws.

On January 2, Maliki said Baghdad would use force to end the protests in Anbar Province, where protesters have blocked off a highway linking Iraq to Syria and Jordan. The Iraqi government says there are foreign agendas behind the protests.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283544/iraq-frees-more-than-300-prisoners/

2. IRAN

- **Removal of anti-Iran sanctions must top agenda in P5+1 talks: Iran MP**

A senior Iranian lawmaker says the next round of talks between Iran and a group of six world powers (P5+1) must focus on the removal of illegal US-engineered sanctions against Tehran.

"Considering the unjust and illegal sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States against the Iranian nation, the lifting of the bans must be the main subject of the upcoming talks with the P5+1," Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the chairman of Iran's Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Monday.

The Iranian lawmaker reiterated that all agreements with the P5+1- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany - must be reached in line with Iran's national interests and no unilateral concession should be given to the opposite party.

Referring to the venue and date of the upcoming negotiations, Boroujerdi said the talks will probably be held in the Turkish city of Istanbul in February. However, he said, "Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) will make the final decision" in this regard.

The last round of talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany was held in Moscow in June 2012.

Iran and the P5+1 have held several rounds of talks with a focus on Iran's nuclear energy program.

Iran's SNSC Secretary Saeed Jalili has said that Tehran welcomes the readiness of the six major world powers to hold constructive talks with Iran.

"Just as Iran feels obligated to act within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regulations and in line with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it is adamant on asserting its rights within the same framework," Jalili stated on January 4.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have falsely accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program. The US and certain other countries have imposed sanctions against the Islamic Republic over the unfounded allegation.

Iran has vehemently rejected the allegations against its nuclear energy program, arguing that as a committed signatory to the NPT and a member of the IAEA, it is entitled to use nuclear technology for peaceful objectives.

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

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283637/iran-p51-should-discuss-lifting-bans/

- **Iran commemorates nuclear scientist on third anniversary of assassination**

Iranian officials and academics have held a gathering to commemorate the life of an Iranian nuclear scientist who was assassinated, Press TV reports.

The event was held at Tehran University on Monday to mark the third anniversary of the assassination of Masoud Ali-Mohammadi.

Ali-Mohammadi was killed in Tehran on January 12, 2010 when a booby-trapped motorcycle exploded near his home.

Days after the assassination, the Iranian Intelligence Ministry arrested Majid Jamali Fashi, who later confessed to having killed Ali-Mohammadi on the orders of Mossad.

Iranian Deputy Majlis Speaker Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard, who also attended the gathering, told Press TV, "The relentless efforts of great Iranian scientists like Ali-Mohammadi have allowed Iran to master nuclear science and technology and also to attain great achievements in the aerospace industry and many other fields."

Several Iranian scientists have been assassinated since 2007, including Majid Shahriari (November 2010), Dariush Rezaei Nejad (July 2011), and Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan (January 2012).

"With the help of such scientific assets, we will be able to" counter the economic sanctions, Aboutorabi-Fard added.

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

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

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

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283599/iran-commemorates-nuclear-scientist/

- **Iran plans to phase out dollar, euro in foreign trade: Econ. min.**

Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Shamseddin Hosseini says the country plans to phase out dollar and euro in its future international transactions after the US and the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on Iran.

"[Iranian] government has made up its mind to phase out vehicle currencies such as dollar and euro in its [foreign] trade," Hosseini told reporters on the sidelines of the first meeting of the heads of Economic Cooperation Organization's tax organizations in Tehran on Monday.

He added that after the imposition of sanctions on Iran by the US and the EU, the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) immediately moved to change the country's hard currencies reserves into euro and gold which "was beneficial to the country."

The Iranian minister noted that a change in trade model would reduce the country's need to vehicle currencies, including dollar and euro.

Hosseini stated that Iran's trade partners have welcomed the decision due to the currency war waged by the US through devaluation of dollar and also because of West's financial crisis which has convinced other countries to phase out vehicle currencies.

On November 22, 2012, the CBI Governor Mahmoud Bahmani called for the use of local currencies in the global trade system as alternative to dominant tenders.

"Iran has taken proper measures to remove dominant currencies, particularly dollar and euro, from its foreign currency reserves as well as its international trade. [In doing this, Iran has shown that] it is possible to do trade without relying on major currencies," he said.

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

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283517/iran-to-phase-out-euro-dollar-in-trade/

- **Reshadat oil field output to hit 22k bpd, Iranian official says**

An Iranian oil industry official says oil production in the Reshadat oil field, located near Lavan Island in the Persian Gulf, will rise to 22,000 barrels per day in the near future.

Abbas Rajab-Khani, the director of the Lavan operational area of the Iranian Offshore Oil Company, made the remarks in an interview with the Oil Ministry's official news agency, SHANA, on Monday.

“Through the inauguration of four new wells, the production capacity of this oil field will reach 22,000 barrels per day,” Rajab-Khani said.

Rajab-Khani noted that the goal of the project is to increase the Islamic Republic of Iran's oil production to 75,000 barrels per day.

The Reshadat oil field, which was discovered in 1965, is located 110 kilometers southwest of Lavan Island in the Persian Gulf.

Iran has 137.6 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and 29.61 trillion cubic meters of proven gas reserves. It has the world's fourth largest oil reserves and second largest gas reserves.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283585/reshadat-oil-field-output-to-hit-22k-bpd/

- **Iran's NIGC bids for Turkey gas distributor**

The National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) is planning to acquire Turkey's main natural gas distributor, Baskent Gaz, currently put to a privatization tender.

Turkish energy officials were quoted by Zaman newspaper as saying that NIGC has demanded the preliminary documents for the tender.

The deadline for bids for Baskent, which supplies gas to 1.4 million people in Ankara, expires on Friday.

The paper reported that NIGC's successful bid for 100 percent of Baskent would further boost energy ties between Iran and Turkey, regardless of Western sanctions against the Islamic Republic's energy sector.

Iran is the second largest natural gas supplier to Turkey.

In December 2012, NIGC chief Javad Owji said Iran's daily natural gas exports to Turkey topped 31 million cubic meters (mcm).

Turkey has said it will keep buying natural gas from Iran despite US-led sanctions against Tehran.

Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said in December that Iran supplies 18-20 percent of the gas consumed by Turkey.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program, with Washington and the European Union using the false allegation to impose illegal unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

In a new move, EU member states on October 15 announced a package of sanctions against Iran, which focuses on Iranian banks, trade and gas exports.

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
Tel: +90(312)4302609 Fax: +90(312)4303948 orsam@orsam.org.tr

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283509/iran-bids-for-turkey-gas-distributor/

3. SYRIA

- **Syrian PM due in Tehran on Tuesday: Iran FM spokesman**

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast says Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi will arrive in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Tuesday.

"The Syrian Prime Minister will arrive in Tehran tomorrow (Tuesday), leading a high-ranking political and economic delegation," Mehmanparast said on Monday.

He also reaffirmed Iran's support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's roadmap for the restoration of peace in his crisis-stricken country.

"The most peaceful way to stop more damage to people [of Syria] in the shortest possible time and create appropriate conditions to meet people's demands is the plan announced by Bashar Assad which conforms to the plan we [Iran] had earlier outlined," Mehmanparast noted.

In an address on January 6, the Syrian president proposed a new strategic roadmap for dialogue with the opposition and political parties to resolve the unrest in Syria.

Assad called for an end to terrorist operations in Syria and urged "concerned states and parties" to stop funding, arming and harboring militants.

"We believe that the self-declared advocates of democracy in different countries should support solutions which would restore peace and stability to Syria and create suitable conditions for people to participate in an election and cast their votes," Mehmanparast said.

"We believe that Syria is home to 24 million people, but the armed groups, regardless of the fact that some of them are foreign nationals or backed by foreign countries, are just a small part of that population who number 100,000 at most. Based on what criteria, one can say that they represent the majority of the Syrian people to determine conditions for Assad to step down?" he asked.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of security forces, have been killed in the turmoil.

The Syrian government says the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283524/syrian-prime-minister-due-in-tehran/

- **Syria bombs rebels bases in Damascus suburbs**

Eight children reported killed in airstrikes southwest of capital, amid calls for Syria to be charged with war crimes.

Children were among the reported victims as Syrian fighter jets carried out lethal airstrikes on rebel strongholds near Damascus, activists have said, amid international calls for a war crimes probe into the 22-month conflict.

Eight children were killed in an airstrike on Monday on the town of Moadamiyeh, southwest of the capital, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Five women were also reported killed in the air raid.

"The children, all members of the same clan, were aged between six months and nine years old," said Rami Abdelrahman, the head of the UK-based group.

Video footage purporting to show the aftermath of the attack showed walls blasted off apartment blocks and rubble scattered in the streets.

The Syrian government offered its own account of the blast in Moadamiyeh, saying "terrorists", its label for rebels fighting to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad, fired a shell at the area, hitting a residential building and causing an undefined number of casualties.

Rebels said the strike on Moadamiyeh came amid a government offencive to push fighters from the area and the adjacent southwest suburb of Daraya.

The two suburbs were taken by rebels several weeks ago, but opposition fighters have been bogged down in clashes with government troops since then.

The Observatory said 26 children were killed across Syria on Monday, five of them in an airstrike in Aleppo province.

The UN says more than 60,000 people have been killed since the Syrian uprising began in March 2011.

'War crimes'

At least 57 countries on Monday called on the UN Security Council to refer the Syria conflict to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for a war crimes investigation.

Switzerland sent a petition requesting the move to the 15-member council, the only body that can refer the case to the ICC but which is deeply divided over the conflict.

The signatories included many European governments as well as Libya and Tunisia, which both saw Arab Spring uprisings overthrow longstanding autocratic regimes.

The letter called on the Security Council to refer the Syria conflict for an ICC investigation "without exceptions and irrespective of the alleged perpetrators".

As Syria is not an ICC member, only a Security Council referral could start a war crimes investigation. But diplomats said the council's divide on Syria is so deep that no move by the body is now possible.

Russia and China, both veto-wielding permanent council members, have refused to sign the petition.

Meanwhile, the secretary-general of NATO said the alliance had no plans to intervene in Syria, warning that foreign intervention could have "unpredictable regional repercussions".

Anders Fogh Rasmussen told a defence conference in Sweden that Syria is more politically, religiously and ethnically complex than Libya, where NATO airstrikes in 2011 helped rebels overthrow Muammar Gaddafi.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201311418552861272.html

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **UN concerned over Israeli plan**

The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon has once again voiced concerns about Israel's new settlement plans on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, urging the regime to put an end to its expansionist policies.

The UN chief is following "with concern" the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans of illegal settlement construction in the E1 area, UN deputy spokesman, Eduardo del Buey said on Monday.

Despite international condemnations, Israel has announced new plans to construct 170 new settler units and 84 guest rooms in the West Bank region.

E1 project aims at connecting the West Bank settlement of Maale Adumim to East al-Quds (Jerusalem), about six kilometers away. The plan will cut off the northern part of the West Bank from the south.

Ban further threw his weight behind a recent Palestinian demonstration at the site of Israel's new settlement projects, which was broken up by Israeli forces, urging Israel to respect Palestinians' right to peaceful protests.

On Sunday, Israeli troops forcibly evacuated a protest camp, set up by Palestinian and foreign activists at Israel's upcoming settlement sites in the occupied West Bank.

According to witnesses, at least six activists were wounded in clashes with Israeli forces.

The UN secretary-general has repeatedly criticized Israel for its E1 settlement, calling the settlements illegal under international law.

Israel is globally condemned for its continued construction of Jewish settlements on the occupied territories.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The UN and most countries regard the Israeli settlements as illegal because the territories were captured by Israel in the 1967 war and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied lands.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283617/un-concerned-over-israeli-plan/

- **Palestinian shot by Israeli forces dies in Gaza**

A Palestinian man who was shot by Israeli forces in the besieged Gaza Strip has died following a struggle for his life in critical condition, medical sources say.

The 21-year-old farmer, Mustafa Abu Jirad, was shot in the head near the city of Beit Lahia on Monday.

The Tel Aviv regime has repeatedly violated the terms of a ceasefire it signed with Palestinians, which ended the eight-day Israeli war on Gaza in November 2012.

On January 11, a Palestinian man was killed and another injured by Israeli army gunfire in the northern parts of Gaza. The two men, one of them a 20-year-old farmer, were hit by live fire east of Jabaliya.

Israel launched a major military offensive against the besieged Palestinian territory between November 14 and 21, 2012, which left over 160 Palestinians, including many women and children, dead and about 1,200 others injured.

Gaza has been blockaded since 2007, which is a situation that has caused a decline in the standard of living, unprecedented levels of unemployment, and unrelenting poverty.

The Israeli regime denies about 1.7 million people in Gaza their basic rights, such as freedom of movement, jobs that pay proper wages, and adequate healthcare and education.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283558/palestinian-shot-by-israel-dies-in-gaza/

- **If reelected, PM likely to meet Obama in March**

Messages have been passing between Jerusalem and Washington in recent weeks regarding the likely meeting and ways to set a more positive tone in the relationship at the outset of both leaders' new terms.

If, as widely expected, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu forms the next government following the January 22 elections, the first meeting of his second term with US President Barack Obama is expected to take place in Washington in early March.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has invited Netanyahu to address its annual policy conference in Washington, which will be held on March 3-5. Once there, it is widely expected that Netanyahu will meet with Obama, who will also just be embarking on his second term.

The last meeting between the two leaders took place last March in Washington, also when Netanyahu went to the US capital to address AIPAC. The two did not meet in September, when Netanyahu was in the US to address the UN General Assembly.

Even though the possible meeting is some two months off and as yet unconfirmed, messages have been passing between Jerusalem and Washington in recent weeks regarding the likely meeting and ways to set a more positive tone in the relationship at the outset of both leaders' new terms.

The first meeting between the two men in the White House in May 2009, when Obama surprised Netanyahu with a call for a settlement freeze, is widely regarded as having started the relationship off on the wrong foot, and officials on both sides have articulated interest in ensuring that the first meeting of the second term starts off on a better note.

Netanyahu met with Obama eight times in the US during his first term in office.

The Obama-Netanyahu meeting is likely to come amid a concerted European effort to push the Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process forward.

http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=299585

- **Gaza man shot near border; IDF denies involvement**

Palestinian officials accuse soldiers of shooting man near border; man dies of injury to head in hospital.

Palestinian medical officials accused Israeli soldiers of killing a farmer in the Gaza Strip on Monday, but a military spokeswoman denied

any Israeli involvement.

Mustafa Abu Jarad was shot in the head in the town of Beit Lahiya on the border with Israel, said Gaza's health ministry, run by the territory's Islamist Hamas rulers.

The 21-year-old was taken to Shifa hospital but died later, said doctors.

An IDF spokeswoman said officials had checked "and apparently the incident is not related to the Israeli army."

A source speaking on condition of anonymity said Israel suspected the man was shot by a fellow Palestinian.

The Israel-Gaza frontier has been mostly calm since November when eight days of Palestinian rocket fire and Israeli air strikes killed 170 Palestinians and six Israelis.

Since then, four Palestinians have been shot dead by Israeli troops along the border, most of them in an area Israel has deemed off-limits for several years, citing the risk of attacks on its soldiers.

Palestinians say the restrictions deny many farmers access to their fields.

http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=299567

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Deadly train crash kills Egyptian soldiers**

Military train derails in Giza, outside of Cairo, killing 19 people and injuring more than 100 others.

A military train carrying young recruits to an army camp derailed in a Cairo suburb on Tuesday, killing at least 19 people and injuring 103 others, Egypt's health ministry spokesman said.

The train was traveling from southern Egypt to Cairo when it derailed in the Giza neighborhood of Badrashin, a security source told the Reuters news agency.

The governor of Giza, Ali Abdelrahman, said that injured passengers were being taken by ambulance to nearby hospitals.

"The Egyptian ambulance authority has sent 66 ambulance cars to the site of the accident to move the bodies of the injured and the corpses of the victims to hospitals," Ahmed Omar, the health ministry spokesman, told the official MENA news agency.

The train was a military vehicle carrying conscripted youth on their way to an army camp.

Egypt's railways have a poor safety record, and Egyptians have long complained that successive governments have failed to enforce even basic safeguards, leading to a string of deadly crashes.

In November, at least 50 people, mostly children, were killed when a train slammed into a school bus as it crossed the tracks at a railroad crossing south of Cairo, further inflaming public anger at Egypt's transport network.

Egypt's deadliest railway tragedy happened in 2002, when more than 360 people were killed by a train fire.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/20131150266149627.html

- **Egypt court orders retrial for Mubarak**

Former president and ex-interior minister to face new trial for complicity in killing of protesters in 2011 uprising.

An Egyptian court has accepted an appeal by ousted president Hosni Mubarak and his former interior minister Habib el-Adly, allowing them to be retried over the killings of protesters in the 2011 uprising.

Judge Ahmed Ali Abdelrahman told the court on Sunday he had accepted the appeals by Mubarak, el-Adly and the prosecution. The decision cancelled all previous rulings by the Cairo criminal court.

No date has been set for the start of their retrial. The defendants will remain in jail because they still must face separate trials.

A small crowd of Mubarak loyalists in the courtroom erupted with applause after the ruling was read. Holding portraits of the former president, they broke into chants of "Long live justice". Another jubilant crowd later gathered outside the hospital where Mubarak is being held in Cairo.

Mubarak and el-Adly were sentenced to life in prison in June last year in a court ruling that held them responsible for the deaths of protesters killed by security forces.

If convicted in the re-trial, Mubarak could face a life sentence or have it reduced. Under Egyptian law, a defendant cannot face a harsher sentence in a retrial, meaning the former leader cannot face the death penalty.

Fact-finding mission

After the original trial, many in Egypt were disappointed that Mubarak had not been explicitly convicted of ordering the killing of protesters.

Instead, he was found guilty of being complicit in the killings. Around 850 protesters reportedly died in the uprising, although some rights groups claim the figure is higher.

Mubarak's defence lawyers had argued the former president did not know of the killings or realise the extent of the street protests. However, an Egyptian fact-finding mission has reportedly determined that he watched the uprising against him unfold through a live TV feed at his palace.

In a retrial, the prosecution has the right to present new evidence. But Mohamed Abdel Razek, one of Mubarak's lawyers, said the retrial would be based on the same evidence used in the original trial.

"No new evidence will be added to the case," he said, adding that there were countless flaws in the verdict. "[These] resulted in the unfair trial of our client."

Al Jazeera's Rawya Rageh, reporting from Cairo, said the appeals court is known to be one of the best courts in the country.

"It is very meticulous and goes through every single detail," she said.

On Saturday, an ailing Mubarak was interrogated over fresh charges of corruption and ordered detained for 15 days pending an investigation.

He is accused of accepting gifts worth around $1m from the country's flagship state newspaper al-Ahram.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013113904122538.html

- **France keeps up Mali air strikes, African troop plan advances**

France kept up its air strikes against Islamist rebels in Mali as plans to deploy African troops gathered pace on Tuesday amid concerns that delays could endanger a wider mission to dislodge Al-Qaeda and its allies.

France has already poured hundreds of troops into Mali and carried out days of air strikes since Friday in a vast desert area seized last year by an Islamist alliance that combines Al-Qaeda's North African wing AQIM with Mali's home-grown MUJWA and Ansar Dine rebel groups.

Western and regional powers are concerned the insurgents will use Mali's north as a launchpad for international attacks.

West African defense chiefs were to meet in Bamako on Tuesday to approve plans to speed up the deployment of 3,300 regional troops foreseen in a UN-backed intervention plan to be led by Africans.

Speaking from a French military base in Abu Dhabi at the start of a day-long visit to the United Arab Emirates, President Francois Hollande said French forces in Mali had carried out further strikes overnight "which hit their targets."

"We will continue the deployment of forces on the ground and in the air," Hollande said. "We have 750 troops deployed at the moment and that will keep increasing so that as quickly as possible we can hand over to the Africans."

He saw the African troop deployment taking "a good week."

France plans to field a total 2,500 soldiers in its former colony to bolster the Malian army and work with the intervention force provided by the ECOWAS grouping of West African states.

Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius - accompanying Hollande on a visit aimed at firming up trade relations and making progress on a possible sale of 60 French Rafale fighter jets - said he was confident Gulf Arab states would also help the Mali campaign.

Fabius said there would be a meeting of donors for the Mali operation most likely in Addis Ababa at the end of January.

He predicted the current level of the French involvement in Mali would go on for "a matter of weeks."

ECOWAS mission head in Bamako Aboudou Toure Cheaka said the West African troops would be on the ground in a week. Their immediate mission would be to help stop the rebel advance while preparations for a full intervention plan continued.

The original timetable for the 3,300-strong UN-sanctioned African force — backed by western logistics, money and intelligence services — did not initially foresee full deployment before September due to logistical constraints.

Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Guinea have all offered troops. But regional powerhouse Nigeria, which is due to lead the mission, has cautioned that even if some troops arrive in Mali soon, training will take more time.

The plan is being fast-tracked after a plea for help by Mali's government after mobile columns of Islamist fighters last week threatened the central garrison towns of Mopti and Sevare, with its key airport.

'Safeguard Mali'

French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said France's goals were to stop the Islamist rebels, to "safeguard the existence of Mali" and pave the way for the African-led military operation.

US officials said Washington was sharing information with French forces in Mali and considering providing logistics, surveillance and airlift capability.

"We have made a commitment that Al-Qaeda is not going to find anyplace to hide," US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told reporters as he began a visit to Europe.

As French aircraft bombarded mobile columns of Islamist fighters, other insurgents launched a counter-attack further to the south, dislodging government forces from the town of Diabaly, 350 km (220 miles) from Bamako.

French intervention has raised the risk for eight French hostages held by Al-Qaeda allies in the Sahara and for 30,000 French expatriates living in neighboring, mostly Muslim states. Concerned about reprisals at home, France has tightened security at public buildings and on public transport.

The UN said an estimated 30,000 people had fled the latest fighting in Mali, joining more than 200,000 already displaced.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Monday welcomed the French-led military intervention in Mali and voiced the hope that it would halt the Islamist assault.

Amnesty International said at least six civilians were killed in recent fighting in the town of Konna, where French aircraft had earlier bombarded rebel positions, and called on both sides to spare non-combatants.

France, which has repeatedly said it has abandoned its role as the policeman of its former African colonies, is among the toughest proponents of a speedier deployment of the African troops, and convened a UN Security Council meeting Monday to discuss the crisis.

French UN Ambassador Gerard Araud told reporters after the meeting that the US, Canada, Belgium, Denmark and Germany had also offered logistical support for France's Mali operation.

"I felt that all the members of the Security Council were expressing their support (for) and understanding of the French decision," Araud told reporters.

No Europeans or other African Union members will be allowed in the defense chiefs meeting in Bamako on Tuesday, a western diplomat told Reuters, requesting not to be named.

"They don't want any French pressure at the meeting," the diplomat said.

http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/france-keeps-mali-air-strikes-african-troop-plan-advances

- **UK delegation assures return of Mubarak assets, denies inaction**

A delegation of high-level UK officials are in Cairo this week to discuss the return of assets obtained illegally by figures associated with the former Mubarak regime.

The UK's delegation is led by Jeremy Browne MP, Minister of State for Crime Prevention, who sought to reassure reporters at a press conference Monday afternoon that his government was doing all it could to identify, freeze, and return to Egypt assets obtained illicitly under Mubarak's government, which was widely criticized for corruption and cronyism.

Browne oversees the UK's Task Force on Asset Recovery, which was set up in September last year, shortly after a BBC Arabic broadcast a documentary entitled "Egypt's Stolen Billions," which criticized the role of the UK and Egyptian governments in the asset recovery process.

Thus far, not a single piaster of Mubarak's stolen funds, of which estimates reach into the millions, has been returned to Egypt.

Browne attributed this in part to the political tumult in Egypt, which had produced a succession of "different ministers and different officials," over the past two years.

The UK has consistently complained that Egypt has not provided it with sufficient information to take further steps.

"We are trying to make sure that the information provided by authorities in Egypt is the information we need," said Browne, who said that a UK official would soon be appointed to take up office in Cairo, in order to liaise with the Egyptian government on asset recovery.

Browne clearly sensed an appetite for a swift resolution, but cautioned both that the process of finding illicitly obtained funds may be complicated, and that assets could not be confiscated without due legal process in the British courts.

On 21 March 2011, the Council of the European Union issued an order "imposing the freezing of all funds and economic resources owned or controlled by persons identified as responsible for the misappropriation of Egyptian state funds, and natural or legal persons associated with them."

In the BBC documentary broadcast last year, certain evidence was provided, suggesting that in Britain, not all such assets have been frozen.

Nineteen Egyptians were identified as falling under the terms of the EU freeze order in a notice issued the next day by the UK Treasury. These included Gamal Mubarak, and Naglaa al-

Ghazarley, wife of a former Housing Minister Ahmed al-Maghrabi, currently jailed on corruption charges.

But, BBC researchers found Medinvest Associates, an investment company of which Gamal Mubarak was director, was left unfrozen until it was dissolved in February 2012, potentially allowing its assets to be transferred or hidden elsewhere. Furthermore, Ghazarley was able to register a new company with an address in Chelsea, an expensive area of London, in November 2011.

Responding to a question from Egypt Independent, Jeremy Rawlins of the UK's Crown Prosecution Service refused to comment on allegations concerning specific companies, but appeared to say that it was the UK Treasury, not visibly represented on the delegation, which held the "lead", or responsibility, for asset freezing.

Rawlins also said it "has to be clear that the assets that were frozen clearly are those belonging to or controlled by" the 19 individuals concerned.

It remains unclear what, if anything, this answer has to do with the BBC's findings which were based on publicly available, official UK records, or if Rawlins was implying that an error had been made within the Treasury.

The UK was also criticized for taking more than a month to freeze the assets following Mubarak's overthrow, whilst Switzerland acted within hours. Rawlins argued that the comparison was unfair, given that the UK had to act within the wider context of the EU and took a lead in doing so.

“Switzerland could act unilaterally; it only has to deal with itself. The UK had to carry along 27 European powers, and in that context the UK did very well,” he said.

The delegation abstained from any estimate of either how long it would take for assets to be returned, or how much the eventual sum might be, although it was said that it would be "significant."

Officer Jonathan Benton, who is responsible for the case at the London Metropolitan Police, stressed the delicacy and difficulty of identifying illicitly gained funds.

"The information that comes from the Egyptian authorities is being passed on to the private sector – banking and finance institutions," he said. "We must be cautious in how we do that... and must be satisfied that the release of that information will not unduly prejudice somebody in the action that may then follow."

Rawlins, of the Crown Prosecution Service, promised that concrete steps had already been agreed in meetings with Egyptian officials on Monday, including "case-specific" meetings. He said more meetings would be held on Tuesday.

http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/uk-delegation-assures-return-mubarak-assets-denies-inaction

- **Protests against work, living conditions sweep across nation**

A wave of protests against poor living and working conditions swept through the nation's governorates on Monday.

Residents of the villages around Kafr al-Sheikh blocked the highway to protest against continuous power outages. They left only after the mayor promised to resolve the problem.

Meanwhile in Sharqiya, hundreds of workers of the Rostex Company for Dyeing and Printing went on strike. They demand higher salaries and incentives that match the wages offered at other companies.

Farmers threatened to block roads in Giza in protest against industrial wastewater that factories dump in the canals, contaminating their arable land. “Those factories must move to satellite cities,” said Kamel Omran, a farmer.

Substitute teachers in Minya staged an open-ended sit-in, requesting permanent contracts. “We were promised tenure in a year, but it did not happen,” said Abdel Hakim Mohamed.

In Assiut, workers at Assiut Cement continued their sit-in for the fifth day, demanding better living conditions.

Finally, in Ismailia temporary workers at the general hospital staged protests, also demanding tenure and better wages.

http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/protests-against-work-living-conditions-sweep-across-nation

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Protesters pelt eggs, stones at French embassy in Beirut**

Supporters of Lebanese activist Georges Ibrahim Abdallah have gathered outside the French embassy in Beirut, throwing eggs and stones at the building in protest against France’s decision not to approve his extradition.

The protest comes after the French Interior Ministry refused on Monday to sign documents for the extradition of Abdallah, which was requested by a French court as a condition for his release.

The protesters in Beirut demanded the immediate release of the 61-year-old Lebanese national.

He was also granted parole in November 2012. However, Abdallah was not released, pending a decision on an appeal by prosecutors.

On January 10, the court in Paris confirmed the parole decision and gave the interior ministry until January 14 to issue an expulsion order.

Abdallah, who has spent 28 years in jail and is a former member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), was arrested in 1984 and sentenced to life in prison three years later over allegations of involvement in the 1982 killings of US military attache Charles Robert Ray and Israeli diplomat Yacov Barsimantov.

Abdallah had been denied release on seven previous occasions since he became eligible for parole in 1999.

During a visit to France last year, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati called for the release of Abdallah, naming him a "political prisoner."

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283530/antifrance-protest-goes-off-in-beirut/

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **US allegation of Iran's interference in Yemen, unfounded: Iranian MP**

An Iranian lawmaker has rejected as unfounded US claims about Iran's interference in Yemen, describing Washington's presence as the actual cause of instability in the region.

Ahmad Shohani said on Monday that the US accusations about Iran's interference in Yemen's domestic affairs are unfounded and based on political agendas.

Shohani said the US officials are trying to score political points by making anti-Iranian remarks.

"Over the past few years, the US has tried to create Iranophobia among regional countries by leveling accusations at Iran," Shohani said, adding that Washington has, over the past year in particular, made the allegation of Iran's interference in Yemen by "provoking the Yemeni officials."

US Ambassador to Yemen Gerald Feierstein on Sunday accused Iran of interfering in Yemen's domestic affairs.

Shohani added, "The US and the West are trying to influence regional public opinion by creating a negative anti-Iranian climate through using the media under their control and justify their meddlesome presence in the region by exploiting this hazy atmosphere," Shohani said.

"The US seeks to create tension in the region, because tension serves this country's interest as it can sell its weapons," the Iranian lawmaker added.

Commenting on the same issue, another Iranian lawmaker, Seyyed Baqer Hosseini, said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is against the disintegration of any Muslim country, because it considers the disintegration of regional countries, including Yemen, against the interests of the Muslim world and in the interests of enemies."

Hosseini added, "Tehran respects other countries' sovereignty and the nations' right to determine [their] own fate and will never countenance interference in other countries' internal affairs."

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283631/us-antiiran-claim-on-yemen-unfounded/

- **Bahrain anti-regime protesters hit Manama's bazaar**

Anti-regime protests in Bahrain over the death of a man, who had inhaled poisonous tear gas fired by Saudi-backed Bahraini security forces, have hit Manama's bazaar.

Protests erupted on Monday in several villages near the Bahraini capital, Manama, over the killing of 88-year-old man Habib Ibrahim Abdullah.

Abdullah lost his life on Sunday after Bahraini security forces attacked a peaceful anti-regime protest and fired tear gas in Malkiya village, south of Manama. The protester's nine-year-old grandson was also injured in the incident.

Last year, Amnesty International warned about the Bahraini regime's use of tear gas against protesters and called for an investigation into the tear gas-related deaths.

The Bahraini uprising began in mid-February 2011. Manama promptly launched a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests.

Thousands of pro-democracy protesters have staged numerous demonstrations in the streets of Bahrain, calling for the Al Khalifa family to relinquish power.

On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates marched into the country to assist the Bahraini government in its crackdown on the peaceful protesters.

Scores have been killed, many of them under torture while in custody, and thousands more detained since the popular uprising in Bahrain began.

Protesters say they will continue holding anti-regime demonstrations until their demand for the establishment of a democratically-elected government and an end to rights violations are met.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/14/283531/antiregime-protests-hit-manama-bazaar/

- **Saudi replaces governor of oil-rich province**

King appoints brother of interior minister as new leader of restive Eastern Province, home to country's Shia-minority.

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah appointed Prince Saud bin Nayef as governor of the oil-producing Eastern Province, the Royal Court said in a statement carried by state news agency SPA.

"Prince Mohamad bin Fahad bin Abdulaziz is relieved of his duties as the governor of the Eastern Province, upon his request, and Prince Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz ... is appointed governor of the Eastern province," the statement released on Monday said.

The Eastern Province is home to the country's Shia Muslim minority which has held protests over the past two years calling for more rights and the release of jailed relatives.

The newly appointed Prince Saud is Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef's older brother. After serving as ambassador to Spain, Prince Saud was recalled to Riyadh to serve at the court of his late father, Crown Prince Nayef, who was also an interior minister.

Activists in the Eastern Province said it was not clear yet if the change in leadership would have an impact on policy in the region, where much of the country's oil industry is based.

"It is a significant change. But to my knowledge in the upper echelons of the state, the view of al-Qatif is very much influenced by security issues," said Tawfiq al-Seif, a leader of the Shia

community in Saudi Arabia, referring to the town where most of the Eastern Province protests have taken place.

"We have to wait and see if that will now happen," he said.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013114122814694166.html

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Pakistan protest continues as deadline passes**

Police fire tear gas as supporters of Tahirul Qadri descend on capital amid tight security to demand reforms.

Scuffles have occurred between police and a crowd of tens of thousands of protesters who converged on the Pakistani parliament as part of a "long march" overnight

The protesters are followers of Canadian-Pakistani cleric Tahir-ul Qadri, who led a two-day protest march into the capital Islamabad overnight on Monday to demand a peaceful "revolution" and the dissolution of parliament.

Qadri had given the elected government, whose five-year mandate ends in March, until 11:00am local time on Tuesday (06:00 GMT) to dissolve parliament. The country's Supreme Court, in an apparent response, issued a statement on Tuesday morning declaring that the country's elections would be held on time.

"The Pakistani capital, with a population of over a million, is at a standstill. Everything is paralysed. Schools are closed, people are in their homes," reported Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder from Islamabad.

It was not clear who fired the gunshots on Tuesday morning. An AFP reporter saw police fire tear gas shells at the crowd. Protesters were brandishing sticks and had pelted stones at police around 500 metres from parliament. The AFP reporter said protesters smashed vehicle windows.

Television footage showed police shooting into the air to push back protesters and a man on the ground being beaten by what appeared to be protesters. Demonstrators threw rocks at a vehicle, while others held up shells and an empty tear gas canister. Helicopters could be heard circling overhead.

Rehman Malik, the country's interior minister, told local media that some of the demonstrators had weapons and attacked police with stones.

One of the organisers of the march accused the authorities of trying to provoke them into violence.

"We were peaceful, we want to be peaceful, police fired tear gas and gun shots without any reason," Muzamal Ahmed Khan said.

"This was the government's conspiracy, we are not violent people. We have come here for a peaceful protest," he said.

'Red Zone'

The protesters continued their march and reached the edge of the capital's "Red Zone", which houses parliament and other key buildings.

A large number of security forces have been deployed, and shipment containers and barbed wire were installed to stop protesters coming closer to Parliament House.

Qadri's demand for the military to have a say in a caretaker administration and for reforms has been seen by critics as a ploy by elements of the establishment, particularly the military, to delay elections and sow political chaos.

Qadri's followers dismantled a first barricade of shipping containers separating the initial venue of the protest from parliament and other sensitive buildings in the government and diplomatic enclave.

'Voice to masses'

His supporters say the cleric has given a voice to masses ruled by a feudal and industrial elite incapable of redressing a weak economy, a crippling energy crisis, insurgencies and sectarian violence.

"Look what we are witnessing in our country today. We have no gas, no power, no petrol. Is this the country we aspired to? We should give Qadri a chance," Huma Nadeem, a 20-year-old college girl in Islamabad, said.

The floodlit platform has been festooned with portraits of Qadri and bulletproof glass has been put in place to protect him.

Thousands of security personnel have deployed with paramilitary soldiers, police and private guards searching all individuals before letting them cross scanner gates into the stage area, an AFP reporter said.

Mobile phone networks were shut down to stop fighters from detonating bombs as Pakistan suffers frequently from Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked violence.

The government says the Taliban have threatened to attack the gathering. The Taliban, however, have denied that claim.

Last Thursday, more than 90 people were killed in a suicide attack on Shia Muslims in the southwestern city of Quetta claimed by an extremist Sunni organisation.

If held on schedule, the election will mark the first democratic transition of power between two civilian governments in Pakistan's 65-year history, which has been marked by bloodless coups and extensive periods of military rule.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/01/201311543617347112.html

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

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Sercan DOĞAN tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*

Mithat Paşa Caddesi 46/4 Kızılay-Ankara TURKEY
Tel: +90(312)4302609 Fax: +90(312)4303948 orsam@orsam.org.tr