



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

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1. IRAQ

- **Suicide bomber kills Iraqi Sunni Muslim lawmaker**

FALLUJA, Iraq | Tue Jan 15, 2013 (Reuters) - A suicide bomber killed an Iraqi Sunni Muslim lawmaker as he visited a construction site on Tuesday, threatening to deepen a crisis over Sunni protests against Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Posing as a worker, the attacker hugged Efan al-Esawi before detonating an explosive vest to kill the politician, who once campaigned against al Qaeda after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, police and local officials said.

No one claimed responsibility for the bomb near Falluja, in western Anbar province. But insurgents may be seeking to stir tensions over Sunni protests at a time when sectarian violence is again on the rise since U.S. troops left in December 2011.

"One of the workers at the site went toward him, he thought he wanted something. The worker hugged him and then blew himself up," said Sadoun Ubaid, deputy head of Anbar provincial council.

"This man was targeted because he led the fight against al Qaeda. That is why they would target him," he said.

Esawi was one of the architects of Sahwa tribal resistance against al-Qaeda in Anbar's Sunni heartland that helped turn the tide of the war against insurgents battling U.S. troops at the height of the conflict.

Iraq's al-Qaeda wing, Islamic State of Iraq, has pledged to win back ground lost during the war and has been reinvigorated by Sunni Islamists fighting against President Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/01/15/iraq-violence-idINDEE90E0BX20130115>

- **Armed group “adopts” the assassination of Awakening forces commander**

Shafaq News, Jan 15 / An armed militant group affiliated to al-Qaeda adopted on Tuesday, the assassination of the MP in al- Iraqiya coalition , Aifan al-Issawi for his fighting against al-Qaeda by Awakening forces that have undermined the influence of insurgents in Anbar province.

An official security source told "Shafaq News" that al-Issawi was killed after a suicidal blew himself up targeting the MP, who was participating in demonstrations in Anbar against the government.

Issawi belongs to al-Iraqiya list, a member of the security and defense committee, and before entering the political process he was the leader of the Awakening forces in Fallujah that fought al-Qaeda organization.

Sites and forums supporting al Qaeda have exchanged the news of the killing al -Issawi, as bloggers "jihadists" commented on the subject and considered it as a response to those who fight al-Qaeda militants.

The bloggers said in many sites briefed by "Shafaq News" that "Islamic State of Iraq," organization supports Anbar demonstrations and consider it as a Sunni spring but at the same time it will target any "traitor", in reference to the officials who are involved in the entire political process.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4767-armed-group-adopts-the-assassination-of-the-awakening-forces-commander-.html>

- **White bloc condemns assassinating Issawi**

Baghdad, Jan 15 (AIN) -The While National bloc condemned the assassination of the MP Aifan Issawi of the Iraqiya Slate, describing it as crowd terrorist act.

A statement by the bloc cited on Tuesday "The spate of assassinations Launched by the armed groups against the Iraqi people and their representatives is still there, therefore we warn from escalating this phenomenon."

"We urge the concerned authorities to expedite revealing the side behind this terrorist attack and serve it the maximum punishment," the statement added.

"The terrorist operations are activated in light of the political vacuum, exploiting the political crises to launch such mean operations," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26676:white-bloc-condemns-assassinating-issawi-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Sistani threatens to topple Maliki if force used against demonstrators, newspaper**

BAGHDAD, Jan 15/ Aswat al-Iraq: Close source to Shiite Clergyman Ali Abdul Mehdi al-Karbala'i in Najaf said to Kuwaiti Siyasa newspaper that the renowned Shiite Clergyman Ali al-Sistani "threatened Premier Nouri al-Maliki to adopt a unified stand against him and calling the Shiite National Council to choose another personality for Premiership, if he ordered to suppress the demonstrators in Sunni Anbar province".

The source added that, according to his source, "Maliki is planning to hold an extraordinary session to the National Security Council to issue final decisions to send special military forces to suppress the demonstrations in Anbar and open the highway by force.

The National Security Council comprises ministers of intelligence, interior, defence and justice, as well as foreign minister and representatives from ministry of finance.

The source added that when the Shiite renowned clergymen knew Maliki's intention held a high ranking meeting and sent a delegate to Baghdad to inform Shiite National Alliance to hold an emergency session for the parliament and withdraw confidence from Maliki if he decided to use force against the demonstrators in Anbar and other Sunni provinces.

The source added that the National Alliance has to select another personality in coordination with other political components, including the Kurds and Iraqiya bloc, "because replacing Maliki, at these moments, will save Iraq from a hard civil war".

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28c1doxqumwwtz5u553rqhto3k%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152156&l=1

- **Nineveh demonstrators: our deadline for the government has ended**

Shafaq News, Jan 15 / Demonstrators in Ahrar Square, the center of the demonstrations in Mosul confirmed on Tuesday, that the deadline that they have given to the government to implement their demands has ended and threatened that they will use new "measures" starting from tomorrow, including seeking to "change" the political process.

One of those responsible of the demonstration told "Shafaq News", that "The demonstrators in Ahrar square and after the end of the deadline given to the government to respond to their demands will take new measures starting from tomorrow, the first seeking to change the entire political process."

He stressed that "the demonstrators refuse to negotiate with the government."

The spokesman who asked not to be named didn't explain the nature of the proceedings that the protesters have claimed that they will adopt.

The demonstrators in Nineveh had threatened from an armed rebellion, in if the government insisted on its position after listening to their requests.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4765-nineveh-demonstrators-our-deadline-for-the-government-ended-.html>

- **Taghyeer bloc about to draft law over protecting, organizing demonstrations, says MP**

Baghdad, Jan 15 (AIN) –MP, Haval Quistani, of Taghyeer bloc assured that the bloc is about to draft a law for protecting and organizing demonstrations.

Speaking to All Iraqi News Agency (AIN), he said "There must be a law to protect and organize the demonstrations."

"The problems in Iraq are reflected negatively on the parliament," he added.

"The heated debates inside the parliament are normal issue because MPs represent Iraqis and reflect their problems inside the parliament," he concluded.

Earlier, the representative of the religious authority in Karbala province, Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalyi, called "To avoid any possible clashes to take place between the security forces and the demonstrators."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26648:taghyeer-bloc-about-to-draft-law-over-protecting-organizing-demonstrations-says-mp&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Iraqiya bloc ministers will not attend Cabinet meeting today, MP**

BAGHDAD, Jan 15/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc MP Arshad al-Salihi stated that his bloc's ministers will not attend today's Cabinet meeting, due to "unclear stands of the government on the demands of the demonstrators all over Iraq".

Salihi told Aswat al-Iraq that the non-participation in today's meeting "comes in solidarity and sympathy with the demands of the demonstrators".

On the other hand, National Alliance MP Khalid al-Asadi described the non-participation of Iraqiya bloc as "irresponsible attitude", pointing that Iraqiya bloc ministers are "part of the government that called to meet the demands of the demonstrators".

Iraqiya bloc administers 8 ministries in the present government, including finance, electricity, industry, technology, agriculture, education, communications and state ministry for provinces' affairs, in addition to the post deputy premier for services affairs.

Since 22 December 2012, Anbar province witnessed massive demonstrations and sit-in, in addition to Ninewa, Salahal-Din, Diala, Kirkuk and Baghdad demanding the release of innocent detainees and prisoners, while others called for toppling Maliki's government.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28c1doxqumwwtz5u553rqhto3k%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152158&l=1

- **Talabani's return to Iraq will abort secessionist plots: Lawmaker**

An Iranian lawmaker says the return of ailing Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to the country's political stage will foil secessionist schemes in Iraq's northern Kurdish region.

“The return of Jalal Talabani to Iraq’s political arena can render ineffective the attempts made by the secessionist countries in the region and the Western enemies of an independent Iraq in order to drag the country into unrest,” Mohammad-Saleh Jokar said on Tuesday.

Member of Iran Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee described Talabani as an influential figure in Iraq’s political structure whose presence, given his long record of fighting against the Iraqi dictatorship, “must be seen as good omen.”

“The presence of a sensible and justice-seeking character who has been trying to distribute the rights of Iraqi peoples in accordance with their share of population, can prevent the spread of secessionist views and crisis-mongering backed by Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United States in Kurdish region,” he explained.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283739/talabani-return-foils-enemy-plots-mp/>

- **Wave of terrorist attacks kills 27 in Iraq**

More than two dozen people have been killed and over 200 others wounded in a wave of terrorist attacks in Iraq.



A car bomb went off in a commercial street in the northern city of Kirkuk near the local headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party on Wednesday, leaving at least 16 people dead and 190 others injured, according to health officials.

The bombing was apparently meant to strike local offices of the Kurdish Democratic Party, led by Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan region.

Another car bomb attack in the town of Tuz Khurmatu south of Kirkuk claimed the lives of four people and injured about 30 others. The attack was carried out near the offices of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

In Baghdad, officials said five people were killed in three separate attacks.

Elsewhere, a series of bomb attacks in the cities of Baiji and Tikrit, north of the capital, left two people killed and six others injured.

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombings, but militants affiliated with al-Qaeda are commonly blamed for such attacks in Iraq.

The recent bomb attacks came in the wake of the killing of an Iraqi lawmaker along with three of his body guards and two other civilians in the western province of Anbar on Tuesday.

On December 31, 2012, over 20 people, including children, were killed and 80 others injured in a wave of attacks in several cities and towns in the country.

The Iraqi government has stepped up efforts to increase security across the country over the past few months.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283840/terrorist-attacks-kill-in-iraq/>

2. IRAN

- **Ahmadinejad calls for structural change in economy to neutralize sanctions**

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has underlined the need to make structural modifications to the country's economy as a means to overcome the sanctions imposed against the Islamic Republic.



“Employing national capacities, overcoming sanctions and disappointing the enemy are possible through structural modifications,” Ahmadinejad said in a Majlis open session on Wednesday.

The Iranian president attended the Majlis session to provide the Iranian lawmakers with the latest information about the country's economy.

Ahmadinejad proposed four major ways to solve the country's economic problems, namely the decentralization of the country's wealth and assets, engaging the people in economic activities, making the utmost use of domestic resources and cutting the budget's dependence on oil revenues.

He noted that the sanctions have been imposed on Iran to impede the country's progress and development.

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 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is entitled to use nuclear technology for peaceful objectives.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283875/economic-change-can-neutralize-bans/>

- **Tehran committed to IAEA safety standards: Iran ambassador to UN**

Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Mohammad Khazaei says Tehran is fully committed to the application of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s safety regulations in all of its nuclear facilities.



“Iran’s nuclear safety regulations ensure that nuclear facilities are designed in accordance with the latest state-of-the-art technology and without undue risk to the health and safety of their personnel, [the] public, next generations and the environment,” Khazaei wrote in response to an article published by the New York Times.

The article on the aforementioned news outlet on January 2 had made baseless allegations against the safety of Iran’s Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant.

In a letter to the Western outlet’s editor on January 15, Khazaei rejected the claims saying that the application of the highest safety standards “has always been and continues to be the first priority in design, construction and operation” of the 1000-megawatt plant.

The Iranian diplomat also noted that the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities, including the Bushehr plant, to address their safety.

“After extensive investigation, the agency found that Bushehr enjoys the safety standards analogous to other modern and advanced nuclear power plants worldwide,” Khazaei wrote,

adding that Iran has already started the internal legal procedure to accede to the Convention on Nuclear Safety.

The initial construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant began in 1975 by German companies, but the work was halted following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In 1995, Iran and Russia reached an agreement to complete the project, but power generation was delayed several times due to a number of technical and financial problems. Iran officially launched the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant on September 12, 2011.

The 1000-megawatt plant, which is operating under the full supervision of the IAEA, reached its maximum power generation capacity for the first time on August 30, 2012.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283824/iran-committed-to-iaea-safety-standards/>

- **IAEA delegation arrives in Tehran for new round of talks**

A delegation from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has arrived in the Iranian capital of Tehran for a new round of negotiations with Iranian officials.



The delegation, led by the agency's Deputy Director General Herman Nackaerts, was

welcomed by Iran's Ambassador to the IAEA Ali Asghar Soltanieh on Wednesday.

The IAEA experts are expected to discuss issues regarding Tehran's nuclear energy program with Iranian officials in the coming hours.

The agency says the visit is aimed at finalizing a framework agreement with Iran.

Nackaerts, who is also the head of the IAEA Department of Safeguards, said on Tuesday that the Agency's inspectors also hope to win Iran's green light to visit the country's Parchin military site.

IAEA chief Yukiya Amano had earlier claimed that Iran was making efforts to 'clean up traces of nuclear activity' at the Parchin site.

Iran has rejected the allegation of nuclear activities being carried out at the Parchin military site. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has further pointed out that it is technically impossible to clean up places where nuclear work has been done.

Iran and the IAEA had last met and held talks in Tehran on December 14, 2012. Nackaerts said, at that time, progress had been made in negotiations between the agency and the Islamic Republic.

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

Iran refutes the allegation and argues that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the IAEA, it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283809/iaea-delegation-arrives-in-tehran/>

- **Iran is a trustworthy trade partner for Europe, Salehi says**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says Iran is a reliable trade partner for Italy and other European countries.

“Iran and Italy are two very important countries that have long-standing cultural relations and numerous commonalities,” IRNA quoted Salehi as saying during a meeting with new Italian Ambassador to Iran Luca Giansanti on Tuesday.

Giansanti described Iran as a key country in terms of strategic, regional and energy status.

Referring to the mutual cooperation and the considerable trade volume between Iran and Italy, the Italian ambassador expressed hope that bilateral ties would be expanded in the future.

Giansanti replaced Alberto Bradanini, who had held the post for four years.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283773/iran-reliable-trade-partner-for-europe/>

3. SYRIA

- **Dozens killed in Aleppo University blasts**

Government and opposition trade blame over explosions which left more than 80 people killed in divided Syrian city.

Two explosions have struck Aleppo University in northern Syria, killing at more than 80 people, official sources and opposition activists say.

There were conflicting reports as to what caused the blast on Tuesday, with the government and opposition blaming each other.

The explosions set cars ablaze and blew the walls off dormitory rooms.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights cited students and medical officials as saying that 83 people were killed in the explosions near the university's dorms. More than 150 people were injured, several of them in critical condition, the group said, without giving details about the cause of the explosions.

Other anti-regime activists said missiles fired by government jets caused the blasts. A witness told Al Jazeera that she saw bombs falling from the sky.

Bashar Jaafari, Syria's envoy to the United Nations, called the attack "a cowardly terrorist act that targeted the students of Aleppo University as they sat for their midterm examinations."

Meanwhile, state television said two rockets hit the university, killing students and people who had fled fighting elsewhere in recent months and taken refuge on the campus grounds. It blamed rebels for the attack.

'Terrorist attack'

Mohammed Wahid Akkad, the governor of the city, gave similar casualty figures to those cited by the Observatory.

"So far there are 82 fatalities and more than 160 wounded in a terrorist attack that targeted students on their first day of exams at the University of Aleppo," Akkad told the AFP news agency.

As well as students, the campus houses about 30,000 people who have fled homes in areas of the city ravaged by fighting since July last year.

A military official in Aleppo told AFP that the explosion occurred after rebels tried to shoot down a warplane with a missile, but failed to hit their target.

Fighting between rebels and government forces has reached a stalemate in Aleppo and left the city divided. The university is located in an area under government control. Government troops and rebels frequently exchange rockets and mortar rounds in the city.

Over recent months, Aleppo and the capital, Damascus, have been hit by a wave of explosions that have killed scores of people. Many of the bombings, which have largely targeted government buildings, have been claimed by groups fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

Elsewhere in Syria, troops and rebels fought in embattled suburbs of Damascus on Tuesday, as government air raids and shelling in the other regions killed several dozen people, activists said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013115135151522535.html>

- **Syria condemns attack on University of Aleppo**

The Syrian ambassador to the United Nations has condemned the recent attack at the University of Aleppo as “cowardly.”



“A cowardly terrorist act targeted the students of Aleppo University,” which killed “82 students and wounded 162 other students,” Bashar Ja’afari told the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

Two explosions rocked the University of Aleppo in the second largest city of Syria on the same day. The explosions reportedly targeted an area between the halls of residence and the faculty of architecture on the first day of exams.

“The terrorist armed groups in my country always take advantage of a Security Council meeting to perpetrate a terrorist attack inside Syria and this is indeed what happened today perhaps for the 10th or 20th time since the crisis in my country began,” Ja’afari stated.

According to the Syrian state television, terrorists launched two rockets at the university complex.

Some displaced Syrians, including women and children, who had sought refuge at the university complex were among the casualties.

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

A recent UN report revealed that militants from 29 countries have so far infiltrated into Syria. Most of them are extremist Salafis.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283815/syria-un-envoy-condemns-aleppo-attack/>

- **Syrian army on offensive in Aleppo after university blast**

BEIRUT: Syrian armed forces launched a renewed offensive in the northern city of Aleppo on Wednesday, state media said, a day after 87 people were killed in explosions at the city's university.

The state news agency SANA said the military had killed dozens of "terrorists" - a term Damascus uses for rebels trying to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad - in the new fighting.

Reuters cannot independently verify reports due to media restrictions in Syria.

"The Armed Forces carried out several special operations against the mercenary terrorists in Aleppo and its countryside, inflicting heavy losses upon them in several areas," SANA said.

Aleppo is split roughly in half between government and rebel forces. SANA said dozens of "terrorists" were killed in the rebel strongholds of Sukari, Bab al-Hadeed and Bustan al-Qasr.

Government forces also killed militants in al-Laramon, a area of Aleppo from which Damascus says two rockets were fired into the University of Aleppo on Tuesday, it added.

If confirmed, the government's report of a rocket attack would suggest rebels in the area had been able to obtain and deploy more powerful weapons than previously used.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, said 87 people were killed and dozens wounded in the explosions, but it could not identify the source of the blasts. It said the toll could rise to more than 100 as there were still body parts that were unaccounted for.

State television showed a body lying on the street and burning cars. An entire facade of a multi-story university building had crumbled and cars were overturned. An interior shot of a corridor showed that the ceiling had caved in.

Amateur video footage showed students carrying books out of the university after one of the explosions, walking quickly away from rising smoke. The camera then shakes to the sound of another explosion and people begin to run.

Syria has been plunged into bloodshed since a violent government crackdown in early 2011 on peaceful demonstrations for democratic reform which turned the unrest into an armed insurgency bent on overthrowing Assad.

Each side in the 22-month-old conflict blamed the other for Tuesday's blasts at the university, located in a government-held area of Syria's most populous city.

Some activists in Aleppo said a government air strike caused the explosions, while state television accused terrorists of firing two rockets at the university. A rebel fighter said the blasts appeared to have been caused by surface-to-surface missiles.

The nearest rebel-controlled area, Bustan al-Qasr, is more than a mile away from the university.

The Observatory said rebel sources on the ground reported they were fighting with government forces in the early hours of Wednesday around Bustan al-Qasr, implying a renewed push by government forces to expel the insurgents.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Jan-16/202472-syrian-army-on-offensive-in-aleppo-after-university-blast.ashx#ixzz2I8sDChI6>

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Israel offers tenders for 198 West Bank settler units: NGO**

The Israeli regime has issued new tenders for 198 illegal settler units in the occupied West Bank, an Israeli NGO says.



The Tel Aviv regime issued new settlement tenders for 84 units in the city of al-Khalil, south of the West Bank, and 114 units at the large settlement of Efrata near the city of Bethlehem, Israeli settlement watchdog Terrestrial Jerusalem said on Wednesday.

According to Peace Now, which is another Israeli anti-settlement group, Israel's illegal settlement construction activities hit a record in 2012, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved the construction of over 6,670 new settler units.

Peace Now also slammed a controversial plan for the construction of a new college for the Israeli military on the Mount of Olives in East al-Quds (Jerusalem). “Bringing the military academy to this sensitive spot is provocative,” the group said.

Despite international condemnations, the Israeli regime has announced new plans to construct 170 new settler units and 84 “guest rooms” in the West Bank. More than 200 Palestinian and foreign activists set up makeshift tents in protest against the plan at E1 settlement on January 11.

Israeli forces, however, attacked the tents and forced the activists out of the location.

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

Much of the international community considers the Israeli settlements 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/2013/01/16/283837/israel-issues-new-settlement-tenders/>

- **Israel advances settlement plans after alleged Obama rebuke**

After report that Obama privately criticized Netanyahu's settlement policies, tenders issued for some 200 new homes in Kiryat Arba, Efrat in W. Bank; Yacimovich, Livni slam PM for damaging relations with US.



The Housing and Construction Ministry issued tenders for some 200 new housing units in the West Bank on Wednesday, a day after a US columnist released comments allegedly made by US

President Barack Obama in which the American leader harshly criticized Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's settlement policies.

According to Channel 2, the tenders are for 84 new housing units in Kiryat Arba near Hebron, and for an additional 114 tenders in the West Bank settlement of Efrat.

Bloomberg columnist Jeffrey Goldberg on Tuesday quoted Obama as saying "Israel doesn't know what its own best interests are," in regard to Israeli plans to advance new settlement construction, including that in the controversial E1 corridor.

"With each new settlement announcement, in Obama's view, Netanyahu is moving his country down a path toward near isolation," Goldberg wrote.

Sources close to Netanyahu responded carefully, saying that the prime minister would continue to protect the country's vital national security interests in the coming government that he would lead. The sources noted that Obama had said Israeli-US defense and security cooperation were at unprecedented levels, which was evident in US support for Israeli missile defense systems and diplomatic backing during Operation Pillar of Defense.

But Likud officials accused Obama of "gross interference" in the Israeli election and said the president was "taking revenge" against Netanyahu for his perceived intervention in the November US election on behalf of unsuccessful Republican challenger Mitt Romney. The officials said Obama had been swayed against Netanyahu by President Shimon Peres and former prime minister Ehud Olmert.

The publishing of tenders for new settlement units on Wednesday drew condemnation from Netanyahu's political opponents.

The Tzipi Livni Party blasted the plans, saying "Netanyahu is destroying Israel's international relations and is sacrificing national interests for political considerations right before an election."

"The Netanyahu government's order of priorities is set by its 'natural partners,' the extreme Right and haredim, not the Zionist, sane majority in Israel," the party added.

Livni's party stated that Netanyahu's policies lead to a double loss by isolating Israel and weakening settlement blocs by building outside of them.

Similarly, Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich criticized Netanyahu for ignoring Obama's advice and isolating Israel.

"Instead of listening to criticism, Netanyahu is behaving irresponsibly and provocatively a week before the election," she stated. "The battle against [Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali] Bennett is more important to Netanyahu than facing Obama. Netanyahu is desperately trying to distract from his failures, which were revealed again this week when we saw he has no control over Israel's economy, and is trying to work in the diplomatic field, where he is also a failure."

According to Yesh Atid, Netanyahu is proving once again that he prefers settlers over the middle class.

"Instead of investing in housing, education and lowering the cost of living, the prime minister chooses, a moment before the election, to invest in settlements and is further isolating Israel," the party stated. "In the competition between him and Bennett for votes, Netanyahu chose to wink at the extreme right instead of protecting national, social and economic interests."

Meretz leader Zehava Gal-On said of the new settlement plans that Netanyahu had responded to the "American warning" on settlements "with Chutzpa that will end up costing us dearly."

Strong Israel leaders Arieh Eldad and Michael Ben-Ari said that "it's too bad there aren't elections twice a week," "If Netanyahu would have built in his four years in the government the way he's promising before the election, there wouldn't be a housing crisis in Israel and the attempts to establish a Palestinian state would be considered science fiction."

Eldad and Ben-Ari accused Netanyahu of trying to "steal" settler's votes, while saying he is committed to establishing a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria. The two expressed hope that those faithful to the Land of Israel know not to give their votes to someone who plans to uproot them from their homes.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=299755>

- **State seeks okay to dismantle Palestinian E1 tents**

Government disputes activists' claim that land was Palestinian property, notes it had been declared state land in 1982, 2005.



The state on Tuesday night asked the High Court of Justice to rescind its temporary injunction protecting 25 large white protest tents, erected by Palestinians activists last Friday on an undeveloped area of Ma'aleh Adumim known as E1.

Early Sunday morning Border Police forcibly evacuated over 100 activists from the encampment, which Palestinians have called Bab Alshams. However they left the tents, which were protected by an injunction.

On Tuesday night, in its petition to the court, the state disputed the activists' claim that the land was private Palestinian property, noting that it had been declared state land in 1982 and again in 2005.

The state added that the Palestinians were staging a nationalist battle that had little to do with property rights.

High-level Palestinian politicians are behind the movement, the state warned, noting that the Palestinian Authority's chief negotiator Saeb Erekat was stopped Saturday on his way to the encampment.

The state warned that the tents were provocative and would caused continued public disturbances. They serve as an incentive for Palestinians to continue to attempt to return to the encampment, it said.

The activists plan to use the new encampment to exploit the emotions of the international community, the state wrote to the court in its legal brief.

On Tuesday afternoon, Palestinians tried to return to Bab Alshams under the auspices of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee, which had organized construction of the temporary encampment.

Ch.-Insp. of the Judea and Samaria District Police Dudi Ashraf said about 60 people showed up at the site on Tuesday, with some approaching from the main highway and others scaling down to the site on foot.

Ashraf said police told the activists the area was a closed military zone.

Moments later a number exited their cars and began running towards the site, at which point they were arrested, he said.

Ashraf said police used stun grenades to expel the activists, arresting 13 on the road and a further nine closer to the site of the outpost.

Altogether 22 activists are undergoing questioning at the Judea and Samaria police station, police said late afternoon on Tuesday.

An additional 40 or so activists were escorted out of the area by police, and taken to nearby checkpoints by buses and police vehicles, he said.

Ashraf said the security forces on the scene Tuesday included YASSAM, Border Police, and Israel Police officers, who he said “will show zero tolerance to violations of the military closure.”

Ashraf added that police gave out parking tickets to eight cars that activists left on the side of the highway, and that an additional car was towed from the site.

Popular Struggle Coordination Committee spokeswoman Abir Koptiy charged that the police had treated them violently. She vowed that activists would continue the nonviolent fight to return to their land on E1.

“We are determined that the occupation won’t stop us,” she said, explaining that the land on which the tents were built belonged at one time to the east Jerusalem neighborhood of E-Tur.

The creation of Bab Alshams was sparked by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s November 30 decision to advance plans to build 3,500 new units on E1.

Both Israelis and Palestinians claim that the area is integral for future development to securing their future in the region, and both want sovereignty over it.

In New York, UN Secretary- General Ban Ki-moon took notice of Bab Alshams. On Monday night, Ban said it was important for E1 protests “to continue to remain peaceful and for the right to peaceful protest to be fully respected” and that he too was concerned by Netanyahu’s decision.

Ban noted that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law, and repeated his call that any such settlement plans for E1 must be rescinded.

Recent Palestinian demonstrations in the E1 area, as well as the Israeli evacuation of the protesters, were largely nonviolent, he said.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=299722>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **France 'hours away' from direct Mali combat**

French soldiers heading north towards rebel strongholds, as Nigeria deploys about 200 troops to take part in conflict.



French troops are heading north in Mali towards rebel-occupied territory at the start of a land assault that will put soldiers in direct combat "within hours".

Nigeria is leading the African intervention in the country, with the deployment of about 200 soldiers as foreign governments invest heavily in the country to prevent it from falling into rebel hands.

Edouard Guillaud, France's military chief of staff, said that the French ground operations began overnight.

Al Jazeera's Nazanine Moshiri, reporting from Bamako, confirmed reports that the French troops were heading north from the Malian capital.

"It is a very difficult situation for the French," said Moshiri. "Ansar al Din and other armed rebel groups that have control of the area know the terrain very well, and they have very sophisticated weapons."

She added that the first Nigerian contingent of about 190 soldiers are to arrive later on Wednesday and that the Niger parliament is waiting for approval to send its own contingent of more than 500 soldiers, who are waiting at the border.

Some of the French troops are headed toward Diabily, where France had been carrying out airstrikes since Saturday after rebels seized the town as well as a military camp.

Diabaly residents who fled the area told the AP news agency that al-Qaeda-linked rebels have sealed off the roads to the town and are preventing people from leaving, fearing that the rebels would use the residents of the town as a human shield.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/01/2013116101421991386.html>

- **Al-Shabab sentence French agent to death**

Somali armed group says hostage held for three years will be executed in response to failed French rescue bid.



The armed Islamist group al-Shabab has said it has decided to execute a French intelligence agent who has been held captive for three years and was the object of an unsuccessful rescue bid in Somalia on Saturday.

The al-Qaeda-linked group released a statement on Tuesday saying it had "reached a unanimous decision to execute the French intelligence officer, Denis Alex".

"With the rescue attempt, France has voluntarily signed Alex's death warrant," said al-Shabab.

A senior al-Shabab official told the AFP news agency that Alex "has been sentenced and this judgement will not be changed".

"As far as we are concerned this man should die," he added .

French officials had previously said that Alex, presumed to be an alias for the agent, was most likely killed by his captors during the failed rescue attempt, which left two French soldiers and 17 rebels dead.

French troops retrieved the bodies of one of the soldiers killed in the attack, and Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French defence minister, said on Saturday that the other soldier was missing, presumed dead.

Pictures of the second French soldier, who al-Shabab say was the commander of the raid, were posted on its Twitter page.

The statement released by al-Shabab on Tuesday said that the "commander" was severely injured during the attack and captured by the group, but later succumbed to his injuries at a hospital.

Le Drian said on Monday that the missing soldier had died, without indicating if he was the commander of the mission.

He also said that 17 fighters were killed in the raid. Witnesses claimed that eight civilians also died during the operation at Bulomarer, a al-Shabab controlled town south of Mogadishu, the capital.

A spokesman for al-Shabab told Al Jazeera in an exclusive interview on Sunday that French troops had attacked a house in Bulomarer, but al-Shabab fighters had pushed them back.

"When the [French] soldiers could not get anywhere, they used helicopters to bomb indiscriminately," said Ali Mahmoud Rage, who added the French were unable to successfully achieve their mission.

"[The French] also killed more than 10 civilians, including women, men, and the elderly," he said.
"They also failed to capture the French soldier, and he is still in our custody."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/01/201311683144169632.html>

- **Egyptian lawyer gets jail term in Saudi case**

Rights activist whose arrest prompted diplomatic row sentenced to five years in jail and 300 lashes for drug smuggling.



A Saudi court has sentenced an Egyptian rights lawyer - whose arrest on drug-trafficking charges led to a diplomatic row between the two countries - to five years in prison and 300 lashes.

Ahmed al-Gizawi was accused of trying to smuggle 21,380 capsules of the anti-anxiety drug Xanax, which is banned in Saudi Arabia where drug trafficking carries the death sentence.

The case has caused an outcry in Egypt where rights activists say he was arrested because of his criticism of the Saudi government.

Two other men arrested in the same case, one Egyptian and one Saudi, were also sentenced to prison terms and lashes.

"These verdicts are lenient" given the defendants' "good morals ... and the lack of judicial precedents," the judge said at the hearing on Tuesday.

The judge asked three men if they accepted the ruling and they all replied negatively. The verdicts can be appealed within one month.

The Egyptian consulate in Jeddah said it was appealing the verdict.

Death penalty sought

The prosecution, which alleged that Gizawi had hidden the banned substance in two milk cartons and a cover for the Quran, had demanded the death penalty for the lawyer.

Gizawi had travelled in April to Saudi Arabia with his wife for a pilgrimage when he was detained at Jeddah airport, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information said at the time.

The Egyptian organisation said Gizawi was held after he had earlier been sentenced in absentia to one year in prison and 20 lashes for criticising the Saudi government.

The group said Gizawi had been critical of the treatment of Egyptian detainees in Saudi prisons.

A partner at Gizawi's law firm, Mohammed Nabil, said the case was politically motivated.

"There's absolutely no justice in this case. We're not asking for an exception. If he's guilty, then he should be convicted, but he's not," he told the Associated Press news agency.

Hundreds of Egyptian protesters rallied outside the Saudi embassy in Cairo in April demanding his release, prompting the kingdom to shut down its mission.

The embassy reopened on May 4 following a visit by a large delegation of prominent Egyptian figures to Riyadh and a meeting with King Abdullah.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013115165146930430.html>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Lebanon's Jumblatt heads to Moscow**

BEIRUT: Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt headed to Moscow Wednesday for talks with Russian officials, a PSP source told The Daily Star.

Media reports said the talks would focus on regional developments, particularly the unrest in Syria.

They said Jumblatt's visit came in response to an official invitation where he will meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

A source at Beirut airport said Jumblatt left on board a private plane after midday.

The PSP source would not give details.

Jumblatt and Russia have different views on the Syria crisis.

Although Jumblatt was once an ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad and his late father, President Hafez Assad, he has supported the opposition against the Syrian regime and pressed the Druze in Syria to join the uprising against Assad.

But Syria's Druze, concentrated in southern Swaida and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, have been reluctant to do so.

Members of other minorities have also been unwilling to join the rebellion against the regime for fear that a post-Assad Syria may be dominated by Islamist extremists.

Russia has blocked three Western-backed U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at putting pressure on Assad and has warned against Assad's ouster from power.

Moscow has said that it will evacuate its citizens from Syria if need be.

More than 60,000 people have so far been killed in the uprising which broke out March 2011.

Permanent U.N. Security Council member Russia said in a Foreign Ministry statement Tuesday that an effort by dozens of countries to refer the Syrian crisis to the International Criminal Court was "ill-timed and counterproductive."

More than 50 countries asked the Security Council on Monday to refer the Syria crisis to court.

The international court prosecutes people for genocide and war crimes.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Jan-16/202480-lebanons-jumblatt-heads-to-moscow.ashx#ixzz2l8shuEuH>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrainis hold demonstrations against Al Khalifa**

Bahraini demonstrators have once again taken to the streets in several towns and villages to protest against the Al Khalifa regime.



The protesters chanted slogans against the regime and called for the immediate release of political prisoners.

A new release of US Defense Department's documents revealed that Washington has been providing the Al Khalifa regime with weapons and combat vehicle parts.

The United States has also been giving Manama communications equipment, Blackhawk helicopters, and a missile system.

The Bahraini regime has arrested many activists, politicians and medical personnel over the past months.

Recently, Bahrain's highest court upheld jail terms and life sentences to dozens of activists, a move vehemently denounced by human rights groups.

The Bahraini uprising began in February 2011. The regime promptly launched a brutal crackdown on the protests and called in forces from neighboring Persian Gulf states to help quell the demonstrations.

Bahraini protesters say they will continue holding demonstrations until their demands for the establishment of a democratically elected government and an end to violations of rights are met.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/16/283878/bahrainis-hold-antiregime-demos/>

- **Saudi clerics protest king decision to appoint women to Shura Council**

Dozens of Saudi clerics have staged a protest against King Abdullah's decision to appoint women to the Shura Council, a body that advises the government on new laws.



About 50 clerics gathered in front of the Royal Court in the capital, Riyadh, to express their opposition to the King's decision to appoint 30 women to the previously all-male consultative Shura Council.

They demanded a meeting with King Abdullah and his top aide Khaled al-Tuwaijri to offer them what they called advice.

"The clerics were in front of the royal court to address the king and Tuwaijri with regard to women in the Shura Council...they waited for two hours but were denied access," Saudi political activist, Waleed Abu al-Khair, told Reuters by phone.

On Friday, the Saudi monarch gave a fifth of the seats in the consultative body to women as part of social reforms promised in 2011. The kingdom's top religious authorities, including the Grand Mufti, have accepted the decision.

This is the second demonstration by clerics, who had issued a fatwa banning any kind of public protest, since the appointment of women to the council.

"There is a contradiction.... The real Salafis do not do what these (clerics) are doing," said Saudi political analyst Khaled al-Dakheel.

"Maybe we are now faced with a socio-political change in the society where we have the traditional Salafi school of thought that adheres to all its principles and now there is a new generation of Salafis emerging that hopes for different proposals. This requires examination," Dakheel said.

Saudi women need permission from their male guardians to travel or take certain jobs and will vote for the first time in 2014.

The kingdom is the only country that does not allow women to drive.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/15/283747/saudi-clerics-against-women-in-council/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Deadly attack in centre of Afghan capital**

Taliban claims responsibility for attack that officials say killed two security guards and five fighters.

Two guards and five fighters have been killed in a suicide attack on the national headquarters of Afghanistan spy agency, officials said.

"There were five attackers involved. The first detonated a car bomb at the gate, the other four were shot dead by police and NDS guards as they approached," Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said, adding that about 30 civilians were wounded in Wednesday's attack.

In a text message to AFP the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that "a large number of intelligence workers were killed and wounded".

A senior police officer said two guards from the National Directorate of Security intelligence agency were killed and others wounded.

Gunshots continued to ring out throughout the heavily guarded neighbourhood about half an hour later as a plume of smoke rose into the sky.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201311681652781550.html>

- **Pakistan soldier 'killed' in Kashmir shooting**

Pakistani FM accuses India of "warmongering" after Islamabad says one its soldiers was killed by Indian troops.



One Pakistani soldier has been killed by Indian troops in the latest ceasefire violation in Kashmir, the Pakistani army has revealed.

The soldier was killed at a position called Kundi during firing from the Indian side that began at 10pm local time, the Pakistani army said in a statement. He was the fifth soldier killed in Kashmir in recent weeks.

Speaking in New York, the Pakistani foreign minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, accused India of "warmongering."

"It is deeply disturbing to hear statements which are upping the ante, where one politician is competing with the other to give a more hostile statement," she said.

Manmohan Singh, the Indian prime minister, said on Tuesday that there could be no "business as usual" with Pakistan.

India has already halted a new visa programme, and the fallout has hit sports events as well.

While diplomats have warned against allowing four recent cross-border killings to wreck a fragile peace process, Singh has called the beheading of an Indian soldier on January 8 "unacceptable."

"What has happened is unacceptable," he said on the sidelines of an army function in New Delhi.

"Those responsible for this crime will have to be brought to book."

Rising pressure

India says two of its soldiers were killed by the Pakistani army on January 8, one of whom was decapitated and whose head is still missing. Pakistan denies that its forces were responsible for the killings, and says that two of its own soldiers have died as a result of Indian firing.

Indian-administered Kashmir's chief military commander also increased pressure on Pakistan, saying a meeting on the border on Monday between the two militaries to calm tensions proved fruitless.

"We accused them of carrying out the barbaric attack... we insisted that the head be returned," Lieutenant-General KT Parnaik said in the Kashmir garrison town of Akhnoor.

The deadly exchanges erupted on January 6 along the militarised de facto border in divided Kashmir known as the Line of Control.

After a total break in ties following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which India blamed on Pakistan-based fighters, relations had been slowly improving. Recent talks had focused on opening up trade and offering more lenient visa regimes.

Visa on arrival

India was meant to begin on Tuesday allowing Pakistanis over the age of 65 to obtain a visa on arrival at the border in Punjab.

However, the programme was put on hold until further notice only hours after Indian officials said it had come into force, although the delay was attributed to "technical" reasons.

Nine Pakistani players were also withdrawn from a new field hockey league in India and asked to return home just before Singh's comments.

"Due to extraordinary circumstances, it has been decided to send the nine Pakistan players home," Narinder Batra, Hockey India chief and the league's main organiser, said.

Media reports also said on Tuesday the women's cricket World Cup, scheduled to be played in Mumbai from January 31 to February 17, could be affected due to Pakistan's participation.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/01/2013115192352331440.html>

- **'Revolution' urged at Pakistan protest**

Tahrir-ul-Qadri demands transitional authority and electoral reforms while government ignores his resignation deadline.

Tahir-ul-Qadri, a Canadian-Pakistani Muslim leader who led a two-day protest march into the Pakistani capital, has called for a "revolution" in Pakistan, after the government ignored a deadline he set for it to resign.

Qadri addressed a crowd of tens of thousands of people gathered outside the parliament in Islamabad on Tuesday.

"We are here in front of the parliament house just to save our country from collapse and from complete ruin," he said in a his address, in which he urged supporters to continue their sit-in until Wednesday.

"We need substantial changes and reforms in our democratic political electoral system. We want to put democracy in its letter and spirit in place."

He welcomed the order issued by the country's supreme court on Tuesday to order the arrest of Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, in connection with a corruption case.

Ashraf was declared to have "violated the principle of transparency", and the country's anti-corruption watchdog was directed to arrest him and produce him before the court by Thursday, officials said.

Abbas Nasir, former editor of the English-language daily Dawn, cited the warrant for Ashraf's arrest issued by the high court as "a noose being tightened very slowly around the government's neck".

Al Jazeera's Osama bin Javid, reporting from the demonstration in Islamabad, said Qadri's "demands for a caretaker government to be established and the assemblies be dissolved have not been heard".

Calls for resignation

Imran Khan, the leader of the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, also announced that his party would call for nationwide protests if a caretaker government was not announced within eight days.

He demanded that President Asif Ali Zardari "resign immediately".

"The government should immediately announce new elections and should also announce a date for it," Khan told the news conference in Lahore. "Change is not possible without holding of free and fair elections," he added.

Earlier on Tuesday, scuffles occurred between police and protesters who converged on the parliament as part of the "long march" overnight, supporting Qadri in his demand of a peaceful "revolution" and the dissolution of parliament.

Qadri had given the elected government, whose five-year mandate ends in March, until 11am local time on Tuesday (06:00 GMT) to dissolve parliament.

Nasir, speaking to Al Jazeera from London, said Qadri's demands fall "well outside of the constitution and legal framework" and that the "maverick" religious leader must realise that 35 million of the nation's 91 million registered voters cast ballots in favour of the current government.

By contrast, Nasir said, Qadri has 20,000 people "out on the street" demanding change.

The 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," Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder reported from Islamabad.

Tear-gas shells

It was not clear who fired the shots on Tuesday morning. An AFP reporter saw police fire tear gas shells at the crowd. Protesters were brandishing sticks and had thrown 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.

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

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.

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

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>

- **Pakistan top court orders PM arrest**

Decision relates to kickbacks case involving contracts awarded when Raja Pervez Ashraf was water and power minister.

The Pakistani Supreme Court has ordered the arrest of Raja Pervez Ashraf, the country's prime minister, in connection with a corruption case, officials say.

The court ordered the arrest of Ashraf on Tuesday morning, in case relating to contracts for the purchase of rental power plants by the federal government when Ashraf was the federal minister for water and power.

Ashraf, in his capacity as minister for water and power, "violated the principle of transparency, therefore, [his] involvement in getting financial benefits out of the same by indulging in corruption and corrupt practices cannot be overruled", the order said.

The supreme court ordered the arrest of 16 people, including Ashraf, and directed authorities to present him in court on Thursday, Aamir Abbas, a lawyer for the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), said.

"The chief justice ordered that all concerned, regardless of their rank, who have been booked in the case be arrested and if someone leaves the country, then chairman of [anti-corruption watchdog] NAB will be held responsible along with his investigating team," Abbas said.

Fawad Chaudhry, an adviser to the PM, condemned the court's order, calling it "unconstitutional".

Meeting called

Asif Ali Zardari, the Pakistani president and co-chairman of Ashraf's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), called a meeting of all parties of the ruling coalition in Karachi on Wednesday in the wake of the announcement.

"[Raja Pervez Ashraf] was the power and electricity minister and during that time he is said to have embezzled millions of dollars, the case was pending at the Supreme Court and the court therefore decided that the PM should be arrested immediately," Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder reported from Islamabad, the federal capital.

"There were serious accusations that the PM was directly involved as minister in siphoning off millions of dollars."

Tuesday's court order came as Tahir-ul-Qadri, a populist Muslim leader, demanded the resignation of the government in protests attended by thousands of followers in Islamabad.

His supporters welcomed the news, celebrating at their sit-in protest outside the parliament building.

Separately, Imran Khan, leader of the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, announced that his party would call for nationwide protests if a caretaker government was not announced within eight days.

Pakistan's benchmark Karachi Stock Exchange index fell by nearly three per cent after the news of the supreme court order, highlighting investor anxiety over political uncertainty.

Yousuf Raza Gilani, the previous prime minister, was dismissed by the supreme court in April last year after being found guilty of committing contempt of court by refusing to send a letter to Swiss authorities related to corruption investigations against Zardari.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/01/201311592859175153.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.*

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