# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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

## 1. IRAQ

- **UN delegation arrives Anbar and meets a delegation representing the protestors.**

Ramadi / NINA /--A,UN chaired by the representative of the UN Regional Office for the Middle East / Amer Ali / arrived to Ramadi capital of Anbar province today.

Member of the provincial council Mizhir Mullah Hassan said in a statement to NINA : "The delegation held a meeting at the University of Anbar with local government officials with the presence of General Secretary of Sahwa Conference of Iraq ,Ahmed Abu Risha , and a delegation representing the protestors to discuss the legitimacy of their demands.

It was discussed in the meeting the differences between the protestors and the central government in Baghdad."

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

- **Iraqiya MP: Sacking Iraqiya ministers is impossible in light of the critical situation, the country is witnessing.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Iraqiya MP, Mohammed al-Khalidi ruled out dismissing the Iraqiya's ministers, due to their boycott to the meetings of the Council of Ministers.

He said, in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that: "The dismissal of the ministers of Iraqiya is impossible with the tense situation and demonstrations and sit-ins, demanding reforms," noting that "the ministers are working in their ministries, and their boycott is a political attitude to refuse the policy of exclusion and marginalization and disregarding the demands of the demonstrators."

He added: "The dismissal of the ministers will increase and complex the political problem."

It is mentioned that MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Hassan Shuairid said that Iraqiya's ministers will boycott the cabinet meeting.

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / yesterday that: "The ministers of the Iraqiya will not attend the third meeting, in a row, to the Council of Ministers, due to lack of implementing the demands of the demonstrators," noting: "The executive, legislative and judicial powers did not do its duty to calm the street and the crisis. "

Fadel Muhammad Jawad, the legal adviser for the Prime Minister, said in a press statement yesterday that "The lack of presence of the ministers of the Iraqiya to the Cabinet meeting would put them to impeachment."

The Iraqiya ministers had boycotted the previous two sessions of the Council of Ministers, due to lack of implementation of the demands of the demonstrators.

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

- **Basra's Governor: Opening Russian consulate is evidence to its important position.**

BASRA / NINA / The governor of Basra, Khalaf Abdul Samad said that "the opening of the Russian consulate in the province is an evidence of its important position," noting that "the diplomatic expansion in the city reflects the security and stability in its territories."

He, in a statement to / NINA / after the meeting with the Russian Ambassador to Iraq, Elia Murgunov accompanied by the Russian Consul in the city, Vajev Kraev today 22, Jan expressed his "satisfaction with the official opening of the Consulate of the Russian Federation in the province," noting that: "the expansion of the Russian diplomat comes as a result of the stability and security in Basra and to the high pace of economic activities in the city. "

He pointed out that: "The future of the city of Basra bodes good state of security and stability, witnessing participation of international companies and investment, which is growing day after day," adding, "We are thrilled that the Japanese side chooses Basra to allow its companies to work in, then we receive the Russian ambassador in Iraq as a prelude to open its country's consulate in the city."

For his part, the Russian ambassador said that "The Government of his country considers Basra with great importance in its foreign dealings, especially in the presence of many Russian companies in the city in the oil field," noting that "Opening the consulate will be in the favor of closer cooperation and upgrading it," noting that "The local government provided, for its part, many of the facilities of the consul in his experimental tenure."

The Russian consul in Basra said that "The Russian consulate's work will include the provinces of Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan and Samawah, and will focus on granting visas between the two sides and provide aid and assistance to Russian investors.

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

- **Al-Jaafari meets with Turkish Ambassador in Baghdad.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The head of the Iraqi National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jaafari said that it is necessary to establish socio-cultural relations between the two peoples of Iraq and Turkey, calling to stay away from statements that tense the atmosphere between Iraq and Turkey.

A statement of Jaafari's office quoted him, during his meeting with the Turkish ambassador in Iraq, Mr. Younis Dimirr, as emphasizing on the need to consolidate the relations between Iraq and Turkey, not only the relationship between the two governments, but to draw long-term strategy, sponsoring interests of both peoples, "stressing that" building a relationship, with political parties, should be balanced with all. "

He explained that "the current crisis is not unsolvable, and the dialogue and active participation in the National forum is the available and decisive opportunity to resolve the obstacles in the political process," adding that "friendly countries, including Turkey can play a positive role in supporting the Iraqi people , and attributing in the solution to the crisis through the friendships that enjoyed with the parties and the political forces. ".

For his part, Dimirr emphasized that "The relations between Turkey and Iraq will witness a remarkable development in the coming period, and he will seek to contribute to the solution of problems, and to support and assist the Iraqi people.

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

- **Deaths reported in Iraq suicide blasts**

A series of blasts in Iraq, including one by a suicide bomber have killed at least 17 people and dozens more wounded.

Tuesday's attacks struck an Iraqi army checkpoint south of Baghdad, a military base north of the capital and a mostly Shiite neighbourhood in north Baghdad, according to police officials.

Seven people were killed and at least 24 wounded when a car bomb was detonated near an army camp oin the town of Taji, 25 kilometres north of Baghdad.

A suicide attack at the army checkpoint in the town of Mahmudiyah, 30 kilometres south of Baghdad, killed five and wounding 14 including four soldiers.

Another car bomb exploded near a market in the north Baghdad neighbourhood of Shula, killing five people and wounding 13.

No one has claimed responsibility.

The string of attacks come five days after an al-Qaeda linked group called the Islamic State of Iraq launched attacks across the country killing 88 people.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201312210464672365 6.html

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran, Russia sign MoU to increase security cooperation**

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to increase security cooperation between the two countries.

Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Alexandrovich Kolokoltsev signed the MoU during a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday.

Heading a political delegation, Kolokoltsev arrived in the Iranian capital on Monday for a two-day official visit upon the invitation of the Iranian interior minister.

“The signing of the security MoU is a cornerstone in the expansion of cooperation between the two countries,” Mohammad-Najjar said.

The Iranian interior minister added that the good relations between Iran and Russia require that Tehran and Moscow cooperate to provide security for the region.

“Training police forces and providing security in the region were among the main issues of the talks [in Tehran],” Mohammad-Najjar said, adding that various other issues such as the Caspian Sea, fighting organized crimes, and human and drug trafficking had also been discussed in the meeting.

Kolokoltsev's visit is the first to Iran by a Russian minister of internal affairs since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The Iranian interior minister visited Russia at the invitation of his Russian counterpart in January 2012 and held talks with former Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev and Russia's Federal Drug Control Service Viktor Ivanov.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284953/iran-russia-sign-security-mou/

- **Iran to design, produce hi-tech space suits in 8 years: Official**

Iran's Aerospace Research Institute says the country will acquire the know-how to design and manufacture hi-tech space suits within the next eight years.

"Iran will acquire the know-how to design and produce space suits by the next eight years," Head of Iran's Aerospace Research Institute Mohammed Ebrahimi said on Monday.

Ebrahimi said his organization and Iran's Shiraz University are cooperating closely with each other on the project.

The Iranian official said the production of space suits is a "high-tech" industry which is costly and requires advanced know-how.

In recent years, Iran has made great achievements in the field of aerospace.

On January 17, the director of Iran Space Agency (ISA) Hamid Fazeli said the country will soon send living animals into space aboard a bio-capsule as a prelude to sending humans into space.

Because of the biological similarities between humans and monkeys, the latter were selected for the forthcoming space mission, Fazeli said.

Fazeli further highlighted that the plan to send animals into space is part of a broader project to send human beings on space missions.

In recent years, Iran has made great achievements in the field of aerospace.

Iran launched its first indigenous satellite, Omid (Hope), in 2009. The country also sent its first bio-capsule of living creatures into space in February 2010, using the indigenous Kavoshgar-3 (Explorer-3) carrier.

Moreover, in June 2011, Iran put the 15.3-kilogram Rasad (Observation) orbiter in space. Rasad's mission was to take images of the Earth and transmit them along with telemetry information to the ground stations.

Iran also launched Navid-e Elm-o Sanat (Harbinger of Science and Industry), another indigenous satellite into orbit on February 3, 2012.

Tehran plans to launch the country's first manned mission to space by 2019.

Iran is one of the 24 founding members of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which was set up in 1959.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284950/iran-to-send-human-into-space-in-8-years/

## 3. SYRIA

- **Planes sent to evacuate Russians from Syria**

Russian government sends two planes to Lebanon for its citizens in Syria, while violence across the country continues.

Russia is sending two planes to Lebanon to evacuate more than 100 of its citizens from Syria, the Emergencies Ministry said, in the clearest sign yet that Moscow may be preparing for President Bashar al-Assad's possible defeat.

"On orders from the leadership of the Russian Federation, the Emergencies Ministry is sending two airplanes to Beirut (on Tuesday) so that all Russians who want can leave Syria," ministry spokeswoman Irina Rossius said.

"It is planned that more that 100 Russians will leave Syria (on these planes)," she told Interfax news agency.

It was unclear whether the flights were the beginning of a longer evacuation operation.

Russia has been Assad's main foreign protector during a 22-month uprising against his rule, but a diplomat conceded last month the government had lost territory and the rebels fighting Assad could win the war.

Moscow is also carrying out what has been called the largest naval exercises since the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, including off Syria's coast, which analysts say are meant to underscore its interest in the region.

Preparing to fly out its citizens is the clearest signal yet that Moscow believes Assad's fall may be possible, though it has made no indication that it will abandon its position that Assad's exit must not be a precondition for a peace deal.

Moscow leases a naval maintenance and supply facility at the Syrian port of Tartous and has had a large presence of employees from Rosoboronexport, Russia's state arms exporting monopoly.

A number of citizens from Russian companies that also have a presence in Syria still live there too. Russian officials say there are tens of thousands of Russian citizens in Syria, many of them also Russian women married to Syrian men.

Meanwhile, around 5,900 Syrian refugees crossed into Jordan in the last 24 hours, according to border police, the Petra state news agency reported on Tuesday morning.

Around 200,000 Syrians have entered Jordan legally since the start of the revolution and have rented homes or moved in with relatives.

Jordan is concerned about this large influx in light of little assistance provided from the international community to host them.

'Deep disappointment'

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN-Arab League mediator Lakhdar Brahimi "deep disappointment and anguish" by the continued bloodshed in Syria, the UN press office said.

"They also expressed their consternation about the lack of a unified international posture that could lead to a transition as agreed at Geneva last June and put an end to the desperate suffering of the Syrian people," it said in a statement.

Ban and Brahimi met in New York to discuss Syria. Brahimi has been trying to help Russia and the United States break their deadlock on Syria which has prevented the UN Security Council from taking any meaningful action on the conflict.

Russia and China have vetoed three council resolutions condemning Syria's government over the conflict, and reject the idea of sanctioning President Bashar al-Assad's government.

Separately, John Ging, a senior official with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, visited the battled-scarred Syrian city of Homs on Monday, UN spokesman Martin Nesirky told reporters.

Ging led a delegation of seven UN humanitarian agencies.

The United Nations had coordinated with both the government and the Syrian opposition for the visit, Nesirky said.

He said the delegation was in Syria to assess humanitarian needs and find ways to improve access to people in need throughout the country. Members of the delegation were shocked by what they saw in Talbiseh and Homs, Nesirky said.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201312282926834439.html

- **Suicide car bombing hits central Syrian town**

Activists say 30 people are killed as a building used by pro-regime militiamen is targeted in Salamiyeh.

A deadly suicide car bombing has killed several people in the Syrian town of Salamiyeh, opposition activists and state media say.

Monday's bombing targeted a building used by pro-regime militiamen and killed more than 30 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

State news agency SANA also reported the blast, saying that "a terrorist suicide car bomb was detonated in the heart of Salamiyeh, leaving a number of people killed and others wounded".

The town, located in the central Hama province, has so far been relatively spared from the violence that has gripped the country since the uprising began in March, 2011.

The UK-based Observatory also reported a deadly powerful explosion in the Damascus neighbourhood of Dummar.

'Thwarts the conspiracy'

The blasts came as Syria's defence minister said that the army would keep chasing rebels all over the country "until it achieves victory and thwarts the conspiracy that Syria is being subjected to".

General Fahd Jassem al-Freij's comments came as activists reported air raids and shelling around the nation, including a helicopter raid in the northeastern town of Tabqa said to have killed eight people.

Meanwhile, Syrian opposition leaders meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, postponed forming a transitional government.

The Syrian National Coalition launched talks on Saturday in a second bid to form a government.

The 70-member coalition was formed with Western and Gulf backing in Qatar at the beginning of December. Power struggles among its members have undermined efforts to agree a transitional government.

A five-member committee would to put forward proposals on a government to the coalition within 10 days, it said on Monday.

The committee would "consult opposition forces and the Free Syrian Army and friendly states to get their opinion about forming the government and the extent to which they can honour the necessary commitments for its financial and political viability," the coalition said in a statement.

Sources at the negotiations in Istanbul said on Sunday that Syrian National Coalition President Moaz al-Khatib had flown to Qatar to secure promises of financial aid for a transitional government in rebel-held areas.

The talks had been hit by disagreement over whether a transitional government could survive when al-Khatib left in the middle of deliberations, the sources said.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201312120464382917.html

- **Over 30 killed in car bombing in western Syria**

Over 30 people have been killed and many injured in a car bombing in the town of Salmiyeh in the western Syrian governorate of Hama.

The blast, which occurred on Monday, targeted a building in the heart of Salmiyeh and left 30 people dead and many others injured, AFP reported.

Medical sources say they expect the death toll to rise to well over 50, adding that some of the injured are in critical condition.

There has been no letup in the fierce clashes between Syrian security forces and foreign-backed militant groups.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the so-called Syrian National Council were unable to form a "transitional government" at a meeting in Istanbul on Monday.

On January 6, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stated that Damascus was always ready to hold talks with the opposition and political parties and that he would call for a "comprehensive national dialogue" after the terrorist activities stopped.

The Syrian president also urged "concerned states and parties" to stop funding, arming, and harboring militants.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since mid-March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of security personnel, have been killed in the violence.

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 fighting the Syrian government are foreign nationals.

And several international human rights organizations have accused the foreign-sponsored militants of committing war crimes.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284871/over-30-killed-in-car-bombing-in-w-syria/

## 4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Israelis vote in general elections**

Prime Minister Netanyahu expected to win a third term in office with a coalition of rightwing and religious parties.

Voting has begun in Israel's general elections, which are expected to return Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to a third term with a smaller majority in a coalition government of rightwing and religious parties.

Security has been tightened across the country for Tuesday's polls, which began at 7am (5:00GMT), and more than 20,000 police officers have been deployed to secure the vote.

Opinion polls predict that Netanyahu's Likud party, which has forged an electoral pact with the ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beitenu group, will take the most seats in the parliamentary election.

But no Israeli party has ever secured an absolute majority, meaning that Netanyahu, who says that dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions is his top priority, will have to bring various allies on board to control the 120-seat Knesset.

Netanyahu has vowed to pursue the Jewish settlement of lands seized during the 1967 Middle East war if he stays in power, a policy that would push Israel away from peace with the Palestinians, put it at odds with Washington, and deepen the country's international isolation.

The next government is also facing challenges at home, including a major budget crisis and looming austerity cuts which are likely to exacerbate already widespread discontent over spiralling prices and the cost of living.

Housing prices

With the campaign nearing its end on Monday, party leaders and activists fought to secure the support of the as-yet undecided 15 percent of the electorate.

One of the key issues of the vote has been the rising cost of living, with Netanyahu coming in for heavy criticism over his economic record.

In a last-minute attempt to sway voters, Netanyahu on Sunday named a former Likud minister known for his success in slashing mobile phone costs to the top post in the Israel Land's Administration in a move he claimed would significantly lower the price of housing.

But his opponents slammed the move as a "fig leaf" and several pundits said it was testimony to the "panic" that Netanyahu was feeling ahead of the vote.

"The prime minister did something yesterday that must not be done in an election campaign, certainly not two days before the public goes to the polls: He projected panic," wrote the Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

Television exit polls are expected to be broadcast immediately after polling stations close at 22pm (20:00GMT) on Tuesday.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201312214815363500.html

- **With set smiles, Israeli leaders turn out to vote**

Netanyahu, Yacimovich, Bennett nudge citizens in final vote push.

Israeli leaders across the country headed to the polls early Tuesday morning, encouraging citizens to exercise their right to vote, while making sure to nudge them in the direction of their own parties.

Israel's fate for up to the next four years will be decided today as 10,132 polling stations nationwide opened at 7 a.m. and will close at 10 p.m. Some 5,656,705 voters will be eligible to choose among 32 parties.

Israel's number one citizen, President Shimon Peres, was one of the first to cast a ballot after arriving at a polling station in Jerusalem.

"You can hesitate over who to vote for, but don't hesitate to vote," Peres said.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara on Tuesday morning voted at the polling station near their home in Jerusalem's Rehavia neighborhood.

"Citizens, you need to decide what you're voting for – a weak and scattered Israel or a strong and united Israel," Netanyahu said at a Jerusalem press briefing on Monday. "I have no doubt that most will decide to return to Likud-Yisrael Beytenu. There is no other ruling party."

Labor party head Shelly Yacimovich voiced a measure of hopefulness on the morning of national elections, saying she was confident that Israelis could replace Netanyahu. "Three to four mandates can really mean that things will be better, that we will be a normal country with strong society and a reasonable economy," she said according to Israeli media.

Naftali Bennett and his wife headed to a polling station in the Bayit Yehudi leader's hometown of Ra'anana. Dozens of activists surrounded Bennett, singing songs and dancing around him as he approached the station, according to Israeli media.

Yisrael Beytenu head Avigdor Liberman recalled Monday's surprise win of the traditionally right-wing Betar Jerusalem soccer team over the Leftist Hapoel Tel Aviv. "Just as the Betarists won

convincingly last night, so too will the national camp - the Likud Beytenu - will win today," he said.

After voting in an elementary school in Ramat Aviv Gimmel, Yesh Atid party leader Yair Lapid touted the importance of voting as being "not a democratic right but a democratic duty."

"The cliché about this being a celebration of democracy turns into a day of sadness if people sit home instead of voting," Lapid said.

Tzipi Livni cast her ballot in a Northern Tel Aviv school, saying her vote represented her hope for a change in Israel's government.

"I put in that envelope my hopes, not just my personal ones, but for the state of Israel as a whole," Livni said. "I am excited because I hope that we will wake up to a morning after, after four years of policy that isolated Israel."

Asked by photographers to flash her pearly whites for the cameras as she put her envelope into the box, Livni coyly said, "I'll smile when the polls come in."

Zehava Gal-On expressed optimism that her Meretz party would have a good showing in the elections after casting her ballot at the Hadar school in Petah Tikva. "I got up and voted with a feeling of great optimism," Gal-On said. "I feel that the Left has a real opportunity and that the momentum is on our side."

Kadima head Shaul Mofaz predicted that his party would be the "surprise of the elections" and encouraged voters to send him to the Knesset. "The Left is inexperienced and the Right is irresponsible," Mofaz said. "Kadima is a true centrist party."

Greer Faye Cashman, Niv Elis and Yonah Jeremy Bob contributed to this report

http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=300464

- **Israel election marred by 65 cases of voter fraud**

As Israelis went to the polls on Tuesday, the Central Elections Committee announced that by 12:30, 26.7% of Israelis had voted, compared with 21.6% at the same point in 2006. The police reported that by midday they had received 65 complaints of voter fraud or irregularities that they were investigating.

In Tel Aviv at 12:00, police received a complaint that a resident went to vote and discovered someone had already voted in his place. In Ramat Gan, someone burned a bus stop with a poster for Kadima.

Likud Beytenu claimed that polling stations in Hadera, Rishon LZion and Beit Ezra were forgeries and warned voters to ensure their voting slips are real. The CEC also received a complaint from Bayit V'Gan, a haredi neighborhood in Jerusalem, that one of the female election workers was not dressed modestly enough and requested that she cover up. A CEC official was on the way to examine the issue.

Eretz Hadasha, whose election slip has the letter "zayin" also complained that their slips were removed in some of the polling booths, and in some cases replaced with slips for the Atid Aher (Different future) party, whose slip is "zayin-heh."

Yesh Atid also turned to the CEC, claiming someone had maliciously moved their slips in an effort to intentionally confuse votes. Yesh Atid slips are marked with the Hebrew letters "Peh-hey" which spell "Po" which is Hebrew for "here." The party complained that voters were getting confused because someone switched the slips for Yesh Atid with the slips for a party called "Hayim B'Kavod" [Living with Dignity] a party which did not pass the two percent threshold in polls prior to the election. Hayim B'Kavod slips are marked with the same Hebrew letters in the opposite order – "hey-peh" and Yesh Atid claimed that someone moved the Hayim B'Kavod slips to the spot reserved for Yesh Atid in order to confuse voters.

In response, the CEC mandated that polling directors must check the booths every half hour to ensure that no one had switched the slips for Yesh Atid and Hayim B'Kavod. In each voting booth, there is a specially constructed drawer with spots for the slips of each of the 32 parties running.

According to the Central Elections Committee, 11.4% of eligible Israelis had voted by 10:30 a.m., which is 1.1% more than the previous elections at 10:30 a.m.

CEC spokesman Giora Pordes told Israel Radio that 100% of the voting locations across the country opened without incident.

In Yad Binyamin, ultra-right wing party Strong Israel sent an urgent petition to Central Elections Committee Justice Elyakim Rubinstein, requesting an immediate halt to voting at that station. Strong Israel claimed activists from Jewish Home were removing the Strong Israel slips from voting booths. "We hope this is a local initiative and not policy for Jewish Home," Strong Israel said in a statement.

The CEC will begin collecting votes when the polls close, at 10 p.m. at most places and 8 p.m. in smaller towns. All the votes are counted at their respective voting locations, and then rechecked to ensure that the results add up to the same number of total votes.

Then the results are uploaded to a centralized computer system. The public can watch the results come in live, at the same time the CEC receives the results, from the comfort of their home computer or smartphone at the following website: http://www.m.votes-19.gov.il/

Around 4:00 or 5:00 a.m. CEC expects to have near final results, barring special votes such as soldiers and hospitalized votes.

http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=300505

## 5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **French and Malian troops enter Diabaly**

French and Malian troops take two key towns with little resistance as troops from Chad arrive in Mali.

French and Malian troops have entered the key central Malian towns of Diabaly and Doutenza, both of which have been in the hands of al-Qaeda-linked rebels for weeks.

A convoy of about 30 armoured vehicles carrying about 200 French and Malian soldiers moved into the town on Monday at about 09:00 GMT, without meeting resistance.

Diabaly, 350km north of the capital Bamako, had harboured the main cluster of rebels south of the frontline towns of Mopti and Sevare until French air attacks forced them to flee or attempt to blend in with locals, residents said.

A colonel in the Malian army had said earlier that a "fringe of the Diabaly population adheres to the jihadists' theories and we must be very careful in the coming hours".

French television footage from Diabaly has shown charred pick-up trucks abandoned by rebels amid mud brick homes.

One resident said the rebels had fled the town which was abandoned by many of its residents, and those remaining lacked food and other essentials.

"We are truly really grateful to the French who came in the nick of time," said Gaoussou Kone, 34, the head of a local youth association. "Without the French, not only would there not be a Diabaly, there would soon no longer be a Mali."

'Total reconquest of Mali'

Malian officials also said that fighters had retreated from Doutenza, where French and Malian forces arrived on Monday morning. A local town adviser said there was no sign of the rebels when the troops arrived.

Paris said the aim of the 11-day old military offensive was total victory. "The goal is the total reconquest of Mali," Jean-Yves Le Drian, French defence minister, said in televised remarks. "We will not leave any pockets" of resistance.

France began its military offensive in Mali on January 11, and has said that African nations must take the lead though it could be some weeks before they are ready to do so. Britain said on Monday that it would consider giving more help to French forces, but would not take a combat role in the conflict.

Rebels in Mali were reported Sunday to be abandoning some of their positions and converging on the mountainous region of Kidal, their northernmost bastion, 1,500km from Bamako and near the border with Algeria.

Kidal was the first town seized by an amalgam of fighters, some linked to al-Qaeda, and Tuareg separatist groups that started the rebellion in March last year.

Tuareg defections

Al Jazeera's Jacky Rowland said there are reports of further Tuareg defections from the rebels as they feel their rebellion has been "hijacked" by the al-Qaeda affilated groups.

“The Tuareg have sensed which way the wind is blowing and they’re afraid of ending up on the wrong side as and when this conflict is resolved,” she said.

Meanwhile, the planned deployment of nearly 6,000 African soldiers continued slowly into Bamako, hampered by cash and logistical constraints. Only 150 African troops had arrived by Sunday.

Senegal, Benin and six other West African nations are contributing to the African mission which is expected to take over the baton from France, and Chad has also pledged 2,000 soldiers.

Desire Kadre Ouedraogo, head of the Commission of regional west African bloc ECOWAS, estimated the cost of an African offensive against the armed Islamist groups at about $500m.

The European Union has pledged 50m euros to the International Support Mission for Mali.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/01/201312110210692285.html

- **UK ready to provide more aid for French war in Mali**

British Prime Minister David Cameron says London is ready to offer more military and logistic aid to the French war in the West African country of Mali.

Addressing a parliament session on Monday, Cameron said that the UK government's National Security Council will hold a meeting on the issue later on Tuesday.

Britain has already sent two C17 transport planes to support the French war.

Cameron added that Britain is now considering sending "other transport and surveillance assets" such as drones to Mali.

The United States, Canada, the UK, Belgium, Germany, and Denmark have already said they would support the French war.

On January 11, France launched the war under the pretext of halting the advance of the fighters in Mali.

On Monday, French and Malian troops seized the towns of Diabaly and Douentza in central Mali.

France's Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said that Canada and Germany had offered vital aid for the attack on the towns. On Sunday, the French defense minister told French media, "The goal is the total re-conquest of Mali."

French forces say they are now advancing towards the north, which is still under the control of the fighters.

On Saturday, Le Drian said the number of the French troops on the ground in Mali could top the initially-planned number of 2,500.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has also pledged to support the French war by sending 5,800 soldiers to Mali.

Some analysts believe that Mali's abandoned natural resources, including gold and uranium reserves, could be one of the reasons behind the French war on the country.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) says around 700,000 people might flee the violence in Mali.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284938/uk-ready-to-further-boost-french-war/

## 6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Those revealing info could be held in contempt: STL**

BEIRUT: The U.N.-backed court set up to prosecute the killers of statesman Rafik Hariri condemned Tuesday recent media outlets for publishing names of alleged witnesses.

Al-Akhbar newspaper last week claimed to have revealed the identity of witnesses in a recent report, saying their story showed the "nature of the prosecution's evidence, which is circumstantial at best."

"The Tribunal denounces in the strongest possible terms any attempts at witness intimidation," the STL said in a statement.

"Publicly identifying individuals as potential STL witnesses may endanger these individuals whether or not they are linked to the Tribunal," the statement added.

Al-Akhbar, a staunch critic of the international tribunal and the court process, published the names, photos and information of a number of individuals it claimed were being named as witnesses by the STL prosecution.

Al-Akhbar said the witnesses' names, ages and occupation were leaked from within the tribunal.

In its statement Tuesday, the STL warned that the tribunal has the power to determine and enforce legal rights.

"Any efforts by individuals or the media to disclose confidential material or to undermine the administration of justice are taken very seriously by the STL's four organs.

"Persons who disclose confidential information from the STL may be in direct contravention of judicial orders and be subject to judicial proceedings for contempt.

The STL was set up in 2007, two years after Hariri's assassination when a truck bomb exploded in Downtown Beirut.

In 2011 the prosecution indicted four members of Hezbollah in absentia for the bombing and has been slowly moving toward a trial. So far the case revealed by the prosecution hinges on cellphone data and testimony of over 550 witnesses.

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Jan-22/203329-those-revealing-info-could-be-held-in-contempt-stl.ashx#ixzz2Ii3mgY6t

- **Syria freezes assets of Hariri, Saqr: report**

BEIRUT: Syria's Finance Ministry has frozen the assets of Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Future Movement MP Oqab Saqr, Syrian media reported this week.

Quoting a statement issued by the ministry, the media said the state "has frozen liquid and non-liquid assets for Saadeddine Hariri, Lebanon's former prime minister ... and Oqab Saqr."

The statement added that the ministry also undertook such measures against the spokesperson of the Free Syrian Army Louay al-Meqdad.

The three are accused "of funding terrorist acts in various areas and [the measure comes] in accordance with paragraph one of Article 4 from the anti-terrorism law."

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Jan-22/203325-syria-freezes-assets-of-hariri-saqr-report.ashx#ixzz2Ii3yOJri

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Rallies ahead of Bahrain revolution anniversary**

Anti-regime protesters in Bahrain hold overnight rallies in defiance of a standing government ban on such protests as the second anniversary of the anti-government uprising in the country draws closer.

Rallies were staged in several towns and villages across the tiny Persian Gulf sheikdom on Monday.

The demonstrators chanted slogans, calling for the downfall of the Al Khalifa regime.

In the village of Malikiyah, located some 18 kilometers (11 miles) southwest of Manama, Saudi-backed Bahraini forces fired tear gas and used shotguns to disperse the anti-regime protesters.

The revolution began in mid-February 2011 when people, inspired by the popular revolutions that toppled the dictators of Tunisia and Egypt, started holding massive demonstrations.

The Bahraini government promptly launched a brutal crackdown on the peaceful protests and called in Saudi-led Arab forces from neighboring states to assist the suppressive campaign.

Dozens of people have been killed in the crackdown, and the security forces have arrested hundreds, including doctors and nurses accused of treating injured revolutionaries.

A report, published by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in November 2011, found that the Al Khalifa regime had used excessive force in the crackdown and accused Manama of torturing political activists, politicians, and protesters.

The protesters say they will continue holding anti-regime demonstrations until their demand for the establishment of a democratically-elected government is met.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284952/rallies-ahead-of-revolution-anniversary/

- **Kuwaiti official urges expansion of Kuwait-Iran ties**

Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Ali Fahad al-Rashed has called for the expansion of ties between his country and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Relations between Iran and Kuwait have always been good and we seek to expand the ties with Iran," al-Rashed said on Monday.

The Kuwaiti official made the remarks during a meeting with Iran's Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani on the sidelines of the 8th General Assembly Meeting of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IIPU) in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, on Monday.

Al-Rashed further described Iran as one of the "key and influential" countries in the region and called for the enhancement of parliamentary ties with Tehran.

He expressed hope that other Persian Gulf littoral states would also seek to promote relations among themselves and settle any problems through negotiations and interaction.

Larijani, for his part, praised the "excellent" parliamentary ties between Iran and Kuwait and invited al-Rashed to pay an official visit to the Islamic Republic.

The IIPU meeting kicked off on Monday and will wrap up on Tuesday.

The IIPU was established in 1999 based on an initiative by Iran. It seeks to strengthen parliamentary cooperation among Islamic countries in order to solve the challenges facing the Islamic world.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284910/kuwait-calls-for-stronger-ties-with-iran/

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Co-ordinated Kabul attacks target government**

Taliban claim responsibility for suicide blasts and eight hours of fighting that killed three police and five attackers.

Suicide bombers and gunmen launched an eight-hour assault on the headquarters of the Kabul traffic police, Afghan officials said, in the second coordinated attack on a government building in less than a week.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the operation, in which all five attackers and three traffic police officers were killed, interior ministry officials said. The fighting also left four traffic police and eight nearby civilians wounded.

Monday's attack began when three men detonated suicide bombs outside the main entrance and was followed by the two remaining attackers storming the unfortified area, General Abdul Rahman, the deputy interior minister, said.

The pair, armed with automatic rifles, battled security forces outside the building nestled between two police hubs and close to parliament and a road commonly used by Afghan MPs.

Thick smoke rose from the compound and an Afghan Army helicopter hovered above as Afghan forces returned fire with rockets and machine guns.

The two gunmen were eventually killed by security forces, an interior ministry spokesman said.

A witness described the initial explosion, a car bomb at the front gate of the building, as "very very big - it was massive". That initial blast was followed by subsequent explosions and gunfire that carried on several hours.

Al Jazeera's Jennifer Glasse, reporting from Kabul, said at least two of the rooms in the traffic police compound had caught fire during the clashes.

Sediq Sediqqi, spokesperson for the interior ministry, speaking to Al Jazeera from Kabul, said the Taliban had been contained and that police had gone "going floor-by-floor" to insure no other attackers remained.

Sediqqi cited "slight" wounds among police forces, as a sign that the Afghan National Police are "stronger; we can really contain their damage and give them a quicker response".

A spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, ISAF, said: "Afghan security forces are doing a great job pressuring the insurgents. ISAF will continue to train, advise, assist the ANSF ... [The] Taliban are losing this fight, are growing weaker. Many are leaving the fight because they do not want to fight their Afghan brothers."

Though NATO would not disclose its role in the operation, an eyewitness speaking to Al Jazeera, reported seeing NATO forces "firing a rocket" at the attack site in Kabul's Deh Mazang area.

The Taliban, who claimed responsibility for the attack, told Al Jazeera their target was the border police offices next door to the traffic police compound.

Our correspondent said the initial attack occurred just before dawn, "a time when the streets of Kabul and the building itself would be quite empty," which would be an advantage if the group

intended to use the traffic police compound as a staging site for another attack on the border police.

Monday's blasts were the second co-ordinated attack in the Afghan capital in five days. Last Wednesday, the National Directorate of Security, the Afghan spy agency, was targeted in an attack that left two security guards and five attackers dead.

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/01/201312110329312102.html

- **US-led drone raids kill dozens in Afghanistan**

Dozens of people have been killed in two successive US-led assassination drone strikes in eastern Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

The deadly attacks took place in eastern Nuristan province late on Monday.

There have been conflicting reports about the identity of the victims. Local officials say the strikes targeted Taliban militants, but villagers report that those killed were all unarmed civilians.

Provincial police chief Ghulamullah Nuristani on Tuesday confirmed the attacks, saying the strikes targeted Taliban militants.

He added that at least 35 militants including the foreign nationals were killed or wounded in the strikes.

The latest attacks come on day after a US-led drone killed two people in Kunduz province in northern Afghanistan,

Foreign troops have already been under fire from both Afghan government and public over the deadly airstrikes.

Washington claims the targets of the drone attacks are al-Qaeda militants, but local officials and witnesses maintain that civilians have been the main victims of the attacks over the past few years.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across the country, despite the presence of tens of thousands of US-led troops.

http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/22/284929/usled-drones-kill-dozens-in-afghanistan/

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