



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

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23 JANUARY 2013

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1. IRAQ

- **UN warns of worsening of conditions in Iraq**

IRBIL, Jan 22 (KUNA) -- UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Iraq Martin Kobler warned Tuesday against further worsening of conditions in Iraq, calling on all parties to seek serious solutions for outstanding problems.

Kobler, at a news conference in Kirkuk, said political parties should initiate urgent dialogue to address sticky matters, or conditions in Iraq would worsen further.

"The UN does not see real intentions to overcome problems in Iraq although there is a committee working on solving some demands of the demonstrations in Iraqi governorates," he said.

Kobler noted that demonstrations were a constitutional right and the Iraqi government should meet demands of the demonstrators.

He said the issue of Kirkuk was important for the UN and international community, namely elections.

The governorates of Anbar, Nineveh and Salah Al-Din have been witnessing massive anti-government demonstrations since last month. Demonstrators were calling for the release of female prisoners and punishing those who assaulted the those inmates.

- **Hakim, Mawla discuss Turkmens' situation in Iraq**

22 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, stressed that "The multiplicity of Iraq's social and ethnic components is the source of its strength and wealth."

A statement by Hakim's office cited that "Hakim received at his office in Baghdad a delegation of the Turkmen political forces coalition chaired by the head of Hajj & Ummra Body, Sheikh Mohamed Taqi al-Mawla."

He confirmed that "The Turkmen have sacrificed and suffered a lot for sake of Iraq's stability, peace and freedom of its people."

For his part, Mawla pointed out that "Their meeting with Hakim focused on reviewing the situation of the Turkmen and the repeated targeting against them since 2003."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27143

- **Hamoudi, Sudanese officials discuss enhancing common cooperation**

22 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, Humam Hamoudi called the Arabic and Islamic countries to take brave stance towards the resolutions of the western countries against the Islamic and Arabic worlds.

A statement by the Iraqi Parliament's media office quoted Hamoudi as saying on the sidelines of the 8th member states union conference of the Islamic Cooperation Organization held in Sudan "Iraq is against any siege operation as it affects the peoples and societies," pointing out that "Iraq is witnessing active investment movement and seeks to take advantage of the foreign expertise in the reconstruction process."

"Iraq called Sudan during the experts' meeting of both countries to activate the common cooperation in fields of agriculture and industry," he added stressing "The conference is a chance to exchange expertise and enhance cooperation among the countries."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27138

- **Kuwait MPs ratify \$500 mn settlement with Iraqi Airways (AFP)**

22 January 2013

Kuwait MPs Tuesday overwhelmingly ratified a settlement deal between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi national carriers under which Baghdad will pay \$500 million in compensation, ending a 22-year-old dispute.

Under the deal reached in July, Iraqi Airways agreed to pay the said compensation to state-owned Kuwait Airways Corp. (KAC) for damages caused by the then Iraqi troops of Saddam Hussein during the 1990-91 invasion of Kuwait.

Kuwait's Communications Minister Salem al-Othaina, who chairs KAC, told MPs that Iraq as a sign of goodwill has deposited all the \$500 million in a special bank account and "we can withdraw them after ratifying the settlement."

The settlement, however, amounts to less than half of the \$1.2 billion KAC had said Iraq's flag carrier owed it. Kuwait says 10 of its planes as well as aircraft parts were plundered after its airport was seized during the invasion.

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/kuwait-mps-ratify-500-mn-settlement-iraqi-airways->

- **Wave of attacks in Iraq leaves 22 dead**

By ADAM SCHRECK

Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) -- A string of attacks, including three car bombings in and around Baghdad, killed at least 22 people Tuesday, deepening fears of a surge in violence as sectarian tensions fester in Iraq.

Although there was no immediate claim of responsibility, blame is likely to fall on Sunni insurgents such as al-Qaida's local franchise for Tuesday's bloodshed. The group often uses

indiscriminate attacks to sow fear among Iraq's Shiite majority and undermine the government's authority.

It was at least the fourth day this year that insurgents overcame security measures to carry out high-profile attacks claiming at least 20 lives. Over a two-day stretch alone last week, a series of what appeared to be coordinated bombings and other strikes killed nearly 60 people.

The upsurge in violence has coincided with a wave of Sunni-led protests against Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shiite-led government over what they see as unfair treatment of their sect.

Tuesday's attacks began when a parked car exploded at a security checkpoint in Mahmoudiya, about 30 kilometers (20 miles) south of the Iraqi capital. The blast killed five people, including two soldiers who were manning the checkpoint, and wounded 15, according to police.

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_IRAQ?SITE=FLPET&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

- **Iraq to build southern oil pipeline to boost exports**

BAGHDAD, Jan 22 (Reuters) - Iraq plans a pipeline to link southern oilfields in Maysan province to major export storage depots and China Petroleum Pipeline (CPP) is close to winning the \$650 million contract, a senior Iraqi oil official said on Tuesday.

"This project will expand oil export capacity from producing oilfields of Maysan and Halfaya, and other small fields. It will definitely remove all exports constrictions," the chief of state-run Maysan Oil Co., Ali Maarij, told Reuters.

The line will carry oil produced from these fields to al-Fao storage depots and then to offshore terminals in the Gulf, he said.

He added that CPP was close to winning an engineering and construction contract to build the 300 km (186 miles) 42-inch pipeline.

China's CNPC, France's Total and Malaysian state company Petronas are developing the Halfaya oilfields, and the 2.5-billion-barrel Maysan complex is run by China's CNOOC and state-run Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO).

Maarij said current production from oilfields developed by foreign firms and other small fields has reached around 230,000 barrels per day (bpd).

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/01/22/iraq-oil-pipeline-idINL6N0ARAXV20130122>

2. IRAN

- **War on Iran disastrous scenario: Russia foreign minister**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has warned against any military attack against Iran, describing it as a “disastrous scenario.”

“Regarding the Iranian issue, we have mentioned on many occasions that the attempts to solve the Iranian nuclear issue through force and launching a strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities could be really dangerous,” Lavrov said during a major annual press conference on Wednesday.

“We really hope that the idea will not be implemented in reality. The majority of the countries of the world stick to this similar approach... and we really hope that we’ll be able to prevent such a disastrous scenario,” he added.

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

Israel has at times threatened to attack Iran's nuclear facilities based on the unfounded allegation. The US has also on different occasions said that 'all options are on the table' regarding Iran, implicitly referring to a military strike.

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.

Elsewhere in his press conference, the Russian top diplomat praised Iran's significant role in solving problems facing the region.

"Iran is part of the region. It is one of the most important countries for the region. Without Iran one could hardly hope to address various issues existing there," Lavrov said.

He said that the US did not hesitate to establish contact with Tehran to solve the security issues Washington faced in Iraq and did the same in Afghanistan but opposed Iran's participation in resolving the Syrian crisis although the Islamic Republic had welcomed the Geneva agreement on Syria, which was reached on June 30, 2012.

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

Iran stresses that the crisis in the Arab state must be resolved politically. The Islamic Republic has repeatedly condemned any foreign interference in Syria and denounced the support of certain countries' support of militants carrying out terrorist activities in the country.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285113/war-on-iran-disastrous-scenario-russia/>

- **Cairo welcomes proposal to host Iran-P5+1 talks: Iran FM**

The Iranian foreign minister says Egypt has welcomed Tehran's proposal for Cairo to host the next round of the talks between the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 group.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi made the announcement on Wednesday, saying that Egypt is now consulting with the P5+1 - comprising Britain, China, France, Russia, and the US plus Germany - for hosting the meeting.

Salehi also rejected media claims about Iran's dissatisfaction with Turkey's hosting of the talks, stating that "Turkey made great efforts as the previous host of the negotiations and held them in a very good manner."

The Iranian diplomat noted that other countries would also like to host the talks and the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili has come to the conclusion that it is better for the negotiations to be held in different countries.

Iran and the P5+1 group have held several rounds of talks with the main focus being on Iran's nuclear energy program. The last round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 was held in Moscow in June, 2012.

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

Iran has vehemently rejected the allegation, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the IAEA, it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that its civilian nuclear program has been diverted toward military purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285105/cairo-welcomes-iran-proposal-on-talks/>

- **Iran attaches great significance to ties with Africa: Majlis speaker**

Iran's Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani says the Islamic Republic attaches great significance to the expansion of relations with African countries.



Larijani made the remark in a meeting with Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives Aminu Tambuwal in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, on Tuesday on the sidelines of the 8th General Assembly Meeting of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IIPU).

Referring to terrorist attacks in Nigeria, Larijani said the issue of terrorism has become a challenge to the world and all countries need to work to eradicate it.

The Nigerian official, for his part, said his country and Mali were grappling with terrorism and expressed regret over the failure of other states to condemn the terrorist attacks in Nigeria.

Larijani also held a meeting with Mohamed Djemai, the vice president of the Algerian National Assembly, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, Djemai said the Iranian and Algerian people have many commonalities and called for more trade cooperation between the two countries.

He also criticized the French war in Mali, saying any foreign interference in the domestic affairs of countries would create problems in the region.

Larijani, for his part, said that domestic issues of countries need to be solved through negotiations and dialog, stressing that foreign interference will not yield results but will create problems in the region.

Chaos broke out in Mali after President Amadou Toumani Toure was toppled in a military coup on March 22, 2012. The coup leaders said they mounted the coup in response to the government's inability to contain the Tuareg rebellion in the north of the country, which had been going on for two months.

On January 11, France launched a war under the pretext of halting the advance of the fighters who control the north of Mali. The United States, Canada, Britain, Belgium, Germany, and Denmark have said they would support the French war in Mali.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285095/larijani-stresses-iran-ties-with-africa/>

- **Iran's Ahmadinejad scoffs at Western sanction**

Defiant president says scientific inventions will "create 10 times more money" than West's oil purchases.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iranian president, has claimed the Islamic Republic can create 10 times more wealth from inventions than oil.

Addressing a crowd in the western city of Hamedan, Ahmadinejad scoffed at western sanctions against Tehran for its suspect nuclear programme.

"Don't buy our oil? To hell with you," Ahmadinejad said in remarks aimed at the West.

"It's better if you don't buy... 10 times more money will head to people's pockets through the inventions of our scientists."

Last week, Ahmadinejad said Iran must move away from dependence on oil revenues to overcome Western sanctions that have slowed the economy and disrupted foreign trade. Iran has long depended on oil sales for about 80 percent of its foreign currency revenue.

Iran's income from oil and gas exports has dropped by 45 percent as a result of sanctions. The West fears Iran may ultimately be able to develop nuclear weapons, a charge Tehran denies.

Iran's national currency has also lost about 8 per cent of its value in the past two days, hitting a record low against the US dollar and other foreign currencies in street trading.

Street traders said on Tuesday it reached 36,200 rials to the dollar. It was 33,500 rials on Sunday.

Iran's national currency lost nearly 40 percent of its value in 2012 alone.

Each US dollar was trading at around 10,000 rials, as recently as early 2011. Iranian authorities have accused the West of waging an "economic war".

The country is living under stepped up Western sanctions that also include banking restrictions that make it increasingly difficult for Iran's Asian customers to pay for oil deliveries.

The government is preparing an austerity budget for the next Persian calendar year that begins on March 21.

It aims to avoid a budget deficit by substantially increasing income taxes to make up for shrinking oil revenues.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013122164856324864.html>

3. SYRIA

- **Russia raps Syria's opposition for 'obsession' with toppling Assad**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has taken a swipe at the Syrian opposition for its insistence on the removal of the country's President Bashar al-Assad from power.



The top Russian diplomat cited the opposition's "obsession" with the push for to oust Assad as a blow to the peace efforts by the former UN peace envoy for Syria Kofi Annan and his successor Lakhdar Brahimi.

"For now, everything is running up against the opposition's obsession with toppling Bashar Assad's regime," Lavrov told reporters in Moscow on Wednesday.

"As long as this irreconcilable position remains in place, nothing good can happen. Armed actions will continue and people will die," he added.

The Russian foreign minister pointed the finger of blame at the Syria National Coalition, whose fundamental objective is said to be the overthrow of the Syrian government.

The 70-member coalition was formed in November 2012 with Western and Arab backing in Qatar after opposition groups signed a unity agreement, under pressure from the United States, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, to form a new coalition against Assad's government.

The Syrian government has described the so-called National Coalition as a foreign-backed structure formed to destroy Syria.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285108/russia-lashes-out-at-syria-opposition/>

- **UN must condemn terrorist attacks in Syria: Syrian Foreign Ministry**

The Syrian Foreign Ministry has called on the United Nations to condemn the terrorist attacks across the country, blaming armed groups for the continuation of criminal operations and the violence in Syria.



In two separate letters to the rotating presidency of the Security Council and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday, the Syrian Foreign Ministry called on the world bodies to condemn the terrorist operations in Syria.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry said that terrorists flow into Syria mainly from some neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, and added that the Turkish government provides the terrorists with weapons, which they use to attack the Syrian people and commit terrorist acts inside Syria.

The Ministry said that armed groups and especially the al-Nusra Front are the perpetrators behind the terrorist attacks, in particular the recent attack in the province of Hama that killed tens of people.

At least 32 people were killed and more than 50 others were injured in a car bombing in the town of Salmiyeh in the Syrian province of Hama on January 21.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285085/un-must-slam-syria-terrorist-attacks/>

- **First batch of Russians flown out of Syria**

Two planes carrying 77 Russian citizens arrive in Moscow, while violence across Syria continues.

The first Russian citizens evacuated from Syria have arrived in Moscow in what is viewed as the clearest sign yet the Kremlin may be preparing for President Bashar al-Assad's possible defeat.



Two planes carrying 77 Russian citizens flew from Beirut, the Lebanese capital, on Wednesday for the first time since the Syrian conflict began nearly two years ago.

The move to rescue tens of thousands of Russians living in Syria signals the beginning of what could become a difficult and dangerous operation as rebels gain momentum in their fight to oust President Assad's regime.

Although it has made no indication that it will abandon its position that Assad's exit must not be a precondition for a peace deal.

Those on board were mainly women married to Syrians and their children. After disembarking their flight they were taken by bus to Beirut, Lebanon, and then flown to Moscow. The first of two planes landed shortly after 0100 GMT on Wednesday.

Victoria Nuland, the US State Department spokeswoman, said the overnight evacuation of Russian citizens from Syria "speaks to the continued deterioration of the security situation, and the violence that Assad is leading against his own people".

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.

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.

'It can become protracted'

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said on Tuesday that the scale of violence in Syria made a negotiated settlement "inconceivable," suggesting that no diplomatic end to the crisis is in sight.

"Damascus... which has been a city for the longest period of time, is carpet-bombed," said Prince Saud al-Faisal. "How can you conceive of the possibility of a negotiated settlement with somebody who does that to his own country, his own history, to his own people?"

He urged the United Nations Security Council to take urgent action to end the crisis.

But Russia, a key Syrian ally, likely would not support any such resolution at the Security Council, nor would China. The Russian government expressed fear on Tuesday that the conflict could drag on for months or years more, with no clear outcome.

"You know, at first, the forecasts were two to three months, four, and it is already two years," said Mikhail Bodganov, the deputy foreign minister, in remarks quoted by Russian news agencies.

"So the situation can develop in different ways. I think it can become protracted in nature."

Bodganov also said the Russian foreign ministry wants to have more contact with the various Syrian opposition groups scattered around the world.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013122151331813240.html>

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Netanyahu threatens Iran over nuclear energy program**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has threatened Iran over its nuclear energy program.

Netanyahu made the remarks in an election victory speech in East al-Quds (Jerusalem) on Wednesday.

"The first challenge was and remains preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons," he said.

Exit polls show Netanyahu's hard-line Likud-Beitenu bloc and their allies have won a narrow majority in the Israeli general election.

However, Netanyahu's Likud Party-Yisrael Beitenu and nationalist allies performed far worse than expected in Tuesday's election and lost ground to center-left parties, according to the exit polls.

Israel has repeatedly threatened Iran with a military strike, falsely claiming that Tehran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285041/netanyahu-repeats-antiiran-rhetoric/>

- **Israeli election ends in dramatic deadlock as 99% of votes tallied**

Israel's right-wing and center-left blocs have won an equal share of the country's 120-seat parliament with 99.5 percent of votes counted, the Israeli Central Elections Committee said on Wednesday.

According to the committee's website, right-wing parties, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's list, took 60 seats, and center-left parties, including Arab factions, won 60 seats in the legislative elections held on Tuesday.

That puts Netanyahu on course for a third term in office, this could lead to an increase in Jewish settlements on occupied land as has been his steadfast policy thus far.

Tuesday's vote was the first in Israel since Arab uprisings swept the region two years ago, reshaping the Middle East.

Netanyahu claimed his impending win at midnight on Tuesday, saying "I am proud to be your prime minister and I thank you for giving me the opportunity, for the third time, to lead the State of Israel," as quoted by Haaretz.

"Based on the results in the exit polls, it's clear the citizens of Israel determined they want me to continue as prime minister, and that I form a government as wide as possible," Netanyahu said, adding that he would immediately begin "efforts to form a government which was as broad as possible."

Netanyahu's weakened showing in the ballot, which he had called nine months early in the hope of a strong mandate for his struggle with Iran, could complicate his efforts to forge an alliance with a stable and substantial majority in parliament.

Voting stations across Israel and Israeli settlements in the West Bank opened their doors at 05:00 GMT on Tuesday; the start of the country's legislative elections.

The elections were widely expected to return Netanyahu to office.

The government will face old foreign policy challenges, such as the threat of Iran's nuclear program. It will also have to deal with changes in the region caused by the Arab uprisings.

Besides this, if Netanyahu is kept in power he will have to battle stubborn domestic economic issues, moving quickly to pass a tough austerity budget in a bid to tame Israel's deficit, while managing public discontent over the cost of living and income inequality.

Some 5.65 million Israelis are eligible to vote in the parliamentary election, with 10,132 polling stations open for 15 hours.

Polls leading up to the election have consistently projected that the joint list of Netanyahu's Likud faction and the secular nationalist Yisrael Beitenu will come out far ahead of its rivals.

The center-left opposition Labour party is expected to come in distant second, with the hardline religious nationalist Jewish Home projected to make an almost unprecedented showing and take third place.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/01/23/262010.html>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **French and Malian troops push northward**

French and Malian troops continued to advance northeast on Tuesday, hours after seizing several central towns from rebels.

A Malian official said that the troops intended to push towards the city of Hombori, in the Mopti region. The joint mission, involving French and African troops, aims to wrest back control of northern Mali from al-Qaeda-linked forces who have held control since early last year.

On Monday, troops seized control of Diabaly, Konna and Doutenza, three strategic towns in central Mali.

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

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

'Regular life has resumed'

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. There was little fighting in either town when ground troops arrived.

"Regular life has resumed in Konna," resident Aguibou Toure told the DPA news agency by telephone. "French and Malian troops secured the city. Some people who previously fled have started to come back to the city."

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.

The rebel takeover in northern Mali sparked a growing refugee crisis, with more than 7,000 people fleeing to neighbouring countries over just the past few weeks, according to the United Nations. Some 400,000 Malians have become refugees or internally displaced in the past year.

A state of emergency, in effect since January 12, bans any large public gatherings or other acts that could affect public order, and the government in Bamako on Tuesday extended it by three months.

Officials said no French airstrikes were reported early on Tuesday.

The French offensive has won wide support in the West, and is generally popular among the population in Mali, but it has been criticised by several regional leaders. Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi said on Monday that it "could aggravate the conflict in the region" and stressed that "any intervention should be peaceful and aimed at development."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/01/20131221473430858.html>

- **Egypt's MB launches charity projects ahead of uprising anniversary**

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood announced on Tuesday a reformative campaign to provide social services to the public.

The announcement came three days before the country marks the uprising's second anniversary and prepares for its parliamentary elections.

The campaign called 'Building Egypt Together' is set to continue until Feb. 5, reported Ahram Online.

The project incorporates a variety of initiatives, including “free health services to one million Egyptians, the renovation of 2,000 governmental schools and the alleviation of hardship by providing subsidized produce,” reported the website.

In a press conference held on Tuesday, the Muslim Brotherhood’s secretary-general, Mahmoud Hussein, said the initiative also aims to provide one million apartments to low-income citizens.

The campaign occurs as Egypt marks two years since the start of the revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak and brought in President Mohamed Mursi. The country is at a crossroads, marred by deep political divisions and fears of an economic crisis.

After the seismic political changes of 2011, the Arab world’s most populous nation is struggling to find its balance, between a leadership that boasts the legitimacy of the ballot and opponents who accuse the Islamists of betraying the goals of the revolution that brought them to power.

Opposition groups have called for mass street protests across the country on Friday against Mursi and the powerful Muslim Brotherhood on whose ticket he ran for president.

The National Salvation Front, the largest opposition bloc, has called for rallies “in all the Tahrir Squares of the country,” referring to the capital’s symbolic heart of the Egyptian revolt.

Sixteen other parties and movements have said they would take part in the protests against the president they call “Mursi Mubarak” for failing to reform post-revolution Egypt.

The slogan that brought Egypt to its feet in 2011 - “bread, freedom, social justice” - is applicable once again; many feel little has been achieved since 2011.

Authorities have vowed to keep security forces out of Tahrir Square to decrease the risk of confrontation, but they said police would be stationed in surrounding areas to arrest troublemakers.

Tension in the country is also high ahead of a court verdict on Saturday in the trial of dozens of defendants over the country's worst football disaster.

More than 70 people were killed in Port Said in February last year during clashes in the Suez Canal city between fans of home side Al-Masry and the Ultras of Cairo's Al-Ahly.

Thousands of supporters of Al-Ahly club demonstrated in Cairo last week to demand severe punishments for those responsible for the stadium deaths and have vowed to launch a "new revolution" if justice is not served.

The spokesman of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmud Ghozlan, has said that his movement has yet to decide whether it hold any events on January 25 which has become a public holiday.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/01/23/262030.html>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Parliamentary elections begin in Jordan amid boycott by opposition**

Pro-reform groups in Jordan have boycotted the country's ongoing parliamentary elections, the first general polls since protests in several Arab countries ousted a number of autocratic regimes.



The opposition groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, that have boycotted the election believe the electoral system is manipulated in favor of King Abdullah's government.

Over two million Jordanians are eligible to vote in the polls, in which 1,500 candidates will run for 150 seats in the lower house of parliament. It will be the first time that Jordan's prime minister is supposed to emerge from among the winning candidates, rather than by appointment by the king.

Jordan's state-run Petra news agency said on Tuesday that the Jordanian government has tightened security measures by assigning 47,000 police officers to polling and vote-counting centers.

"Crafting a modern democratic society will be the product of our learning and developing together over time, not a single moment or set of reforms," Abdullah has said.

The Jordanian king dissolved the parliament and called early elections in October 2012 in response to growing calls for political reforms and the end to corruption.

Jordanians have been holding demonstrations since January 2011, demanding political reforms, including the election of the prime minister by popular vote and an end to corruption.

They have also called for a boycott of parliamentary elections, urging King Abdullah to step down from power.

Since the demonstrations began, Jordanian ruler King Abdullah II has sacked three prime ministers to appease the protesters.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285087/polls-open-in-jordan-amid-opp-boycott/>

- **Davos exclusive: Lebanese PM Mikati on economy, regional politics and Syrian crisis**

Prime Minister Najib Mikati of Lebanon is no stranger to Davos; in a ‘previous life,’ he used to attend the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum (WEF) as a tycoon businessman rubbing shoulders with the world’s most influential movers and shakers.



However, he arrives to Davos this year a different man. As head of the Lebanese government in a very delicate time, P.M Mikati comes with a whole new agenda.

In an exclusive interview with Al Arabiya, he says that during his participation at the WEF Annual Meeting he will seek to call on economic and political leaders to perceive Lebanon as the beacon of hope for freedom and pluralism in the Middle East.

THE SYRIAN CRISIS SPILL-OVER

As optimistic as he sounds, P.M. Najib Mikati’s plans are likely to be obstructed by questions around the ‘elephant in the room’: the Syrian crisis spill-over.

Throughout the interview, Lebanon’s P.M repeats that his government is doing what it takes to isolate Lebanon from the consequences of the atrocities happening in neighboring Syria.

Known to have been a close personal friend of President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria, Mikati tells Al Arabiya that it has been two years since they last spoke.

On the humanitarian side, Mr Mikati says that he “feels very sad about the violence that is claiming hundreds of innocent lives each day in Syria.”

As such, he stresses that his government is “committed to support, within its capacities, the displaced Syrian families awaiting their return to their homes.”

According to his figures, over 206,000 displaced Syrians would have been officially registered.

“The situation has reached an alarming level that Lebanon cannot handle on its own,” he adds as he explains that his government designed a sustainable response plan.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND INNER-CHALLENGES

The inner-workings of Lebanon itself are not at their best and tourism in this Mediterranean country is suffering. Recent kidnapping incidents of some tourists from Gulf countries certainly didn’t help and the growing armed hegemony of Hezbollah doesn’t send comforting signals.

In Switzerland, home of the World Economic Forum, P.M Mikati is very likely to also be asked if his country (which was known as “Switzerland of the Middle East”) will ever be able to make a come-back.

He stresses that any country in the geographical case of Lebanon would have suffered from the regional turmoil. On tourism, he admits that there has been less tourists coming in and says that “citizens of countries whose governments have, unlike Lebanon, taken side in the conflict taking place in Syria may have felt some unease.”

There is also the question of Lebanon’s debt, currently estimated at \$56 billion and whether or not this nation will ever be able to make a recovery.

Against all odds, Prime Minister Mikati still sounds optimistic and mentions that the Lebanese banking sector is still enjoying growth in its deposits whilst claiming that his nation’s economy has achieved close to 2 percent in real growth.

The full transcript of the interview is as follows:

Q) Your Excellency, you are a regular Davos-ian; however this time you attend not as a tycoon businessman but as a Prime Minister of Lebanon at a very delicate time; what are the main differences between then and now?

A) Davos is undoubtedly a platform where influential people from different backgrounds meet to exchange their views about the current affairs of the world, both economic and political. During my previous visits, my major concern was always the potential developments in the Arab world as I always felt that we were on the verge of major changes because the unstable equilibrium, that some countries were enjoying, couldn't have lasted forever.

This time, I am participating in Davos as the Prime Minister of Lebanon and our meeting at Davos, comes at times of global developments and changes, time where Arab countries are seeking political reforms, change and effective participation in political life in order to achieve democracy, freedom and respect for human rights. Therefore, my participation will focus on the case of Lebanon, the country that has proven to be the example of a democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic country amongst its neighbors.

Q) What issues do you seek to raise and discuss in Davos this year?

A) As the Middle East witnesses one of the most tumultuous times in its history, I will take this opportunity to call on economic and political leaders to perceive Lebanon as the beacon of hope for freedom and pluralism in our region. I will also discuss the strategic importance of the dis-association policy our government adopted in order to safeguard Lebanon from turbulent regional consequences.

Today, our young Arab communities are most in need of awareness and development that can only be achieved by providing education and employment, so that we can end ignorance and improve living conditions. This will also certainly contribute to fighting extremism. I will suggest that stakeholders including governments, international organizations and financial institutions step forward with their technical expertise while others offer their financial assistance to draft a plan that would be implemented through the framework of a new institution, in order to assist

young men and women working in public administrations to promote good governance, efficiency and productivity in governmental agencies.

In this perspective, I will propose to establish an institution based in Beirut that can offer an integrated program on good governance.

Q) Given the spill-over from Syria, the growing influence and power of Hezbollah and the shaky grounds the whole Middle East is on; does Lebanon have any hope to recover economically, attract investments and tourists and develop its competitive edge?

A) Any country in the geographical case of Lebanon would have suffered from the consequences of the regional turmoil. We are doing what it takes to isolate Lebanon from such consequences. It is true that we have had less tourists coming to Lebanon this year and fewer investments in certain sectors took place. However, our banking sector is still enjoying a growth in its deposits and our economy has shown close to 2 percent in real growth. Therefore despite all what is going on in the region, we are still in good shape, not only in relative terms, compared to the surrounding countries, but also in absolute terms.

One has to keep in mind that the Lebanese citizen has proven to be resilient and we have learnt to adapt to any type of conflict. What is helping us is the fact that we can claim to have one of the most globalized societies in the world. There are Lebanese people living in over 100 countries in the world. Most of them have kept their family ties and they have been visiting Lebanon during summer and during holiday seasons. Lebanese expatriate have also been investing in both real estate and industrial projects.

Our competitive edge is our human capital, which can export itself in dire times, but always returns home even under severe conditions.

Q) The Lebanese public debt is nearing \$60 billion, what remedies are you working on to help reduce the debt? Will we ever see a Paris III meeting? Does Lebanon still have friends that still have trust in it?

A) Lebanon public debt of \$56 billion equivalent is indeed high yet it is manageable, and its management has been improving.

The share of foreign currency debt has been steadily decreasing and progressively replaced with less risky borrowings denominated in LL. I have set a ceiling to the Debt-to-GDP (Debt/GDP) ratio not to exceed 7.5 percent. We certainly need to increase the revenue and try to contain our cost.

The debt is largely held by Lebanese domestic institutions (commercial banks and BDL). The debt predicament has also to be viewed in the specific context of the Lebanese economy where solving for instance the problem of the power sector will alone cut the public deficit by over 60 percent. – A deficit that would then fall well below 3 percent of GDP which few countries in the world can claim.

Our government remedies to the debt problem revolve around: (i) more effective management of public expenditures; (ii) improved management of public assets in which Lebanon is well endowed (with the State being a major owner of the real estate stock, the value of which has considerably risen, let alone the promising outlook for our off-shore oil and gas reserves); (iii) improved management of the debt itself; and (iv) allowing private sector participation in infrastructure financing.

Except for Israel, Lebanon maintains good relations with all countries in the world. The friends of Lebanon have continuously shown their concern and readiness to help us without hesitation. However, I don't see a need for a Paris-III type package, especially at this juncture with the formidable stock of foreign reserves currently held by the BDL.

Q) Tourism has been suffering in Lebanon due to what many believe is Lebanon's inability to guarantee the safety of incoming tourists; recently, the Lebanese tourism minister has insinuated that there has been a conspiracy against Lebanon to promote tourism in the Gulf instead, what is your position regarding what Minister Fadi Abboud said and what can be done to ensure Lebanon regains its touristic edge?

A) Lebanese tourism has indeed been affected by the complications and length of the unfortunate crisis in Syria. Citizens of countries whose governments have, unlike Lebanon, taken side in the conflict taking place in Syria may have felt some unease, and have decided, we believe mostly on their own, to visit or not to visit Lebanon. In any case our government has taken strong measures to try and ensure, in a difficult and volatile regional security environment, the safety of visitors (and Lebanese alike) on the national territory.

When it comes to tourism, and the variety of alternatives tourists require I don't think that Lebanon competes with the countries in the Gulf. Historically, Lebanon has been a touristic destination for a wide range of reasons that few countries in the region can offer. As a matter of fact, aside from the entertainment part, Lebanon has been a destination for cultural, religious, education, healthcare, as well as summer and winter sport activities.

Our government is seeking measures to diversify the country tourism base, which Lebanon needs as a matter of effective economic policy.

Q) You are known to be a friend of the Syrian President, what advice have you given him or would you give him now to deal with the crisis in his country?

A) It has been two years since I had spoken with President Assad. As a statesman, I decided to shy away Lebanon from what is going on in the Arab world, particularly in Syria since we believe it is fair to say that we don't want to interfere in the internal affairs of any country and especially that we as Lebanese always been complaining about regional and international interference in our affairs.

Q) What is your position as PM of Lebanon regarding the atrocities committed in Syria?

A) We feel very sad about the violence that is claiming hundreds of innocent lives each day in Syria. Lebanon reaffirms its dis-association policy on both the political and security levels in order to maintain stability and avoid related consequences and risks. Hence, I always stated that

Lebanon did not dis-associate itself from providing humanitarian support to the Syrian refugees in Lebanon in an attempt to alleviate their sufferings.

Q) Given its financial troubles, how is Lebanon going to handle the continuing influx of Syrian refugees? What is required to provide them with acceptable living conditions?

A) Our Government is committed to support, within its capacities, the displaced Syrian families awaiting their return to their homes. That goes along acknowledging the right of the Lebanese hosting communities for adequate social services. However, these capacities have reached a deadlock and immediate assistance is needed. With the escalation of violence, massive influx of displaced is expected and that requires extensive resources. By January 15, 2013, over 206, 000 displaced Syrians were officially registered.

The situation has reached an alarming level that Lebanon cannot handle on its own. Therefore our Government designed a response plan which looks at sustaining the adequate provision of shelter, food and basic commodities in addition to health care and education services of displaced Syrians. Moreover, the plan will assist Lebanese hosting communities to preserve social cohesion, solidarity and prevent conflict and tension.

A such, International community support is urgently needed for the successful implementation of the Government's response plan in order for Lebanon to be able to sustain its assistance to displaced Syrians and maintain Lebanon's internal stability and peace.

Q) Your Excellency, on a personal note – what it is in it for you? Why do you choose to stay in power despite all what is going on?

A) The Reasons behind my acceptance to become a Prime Minister in 2011 are back again. Two years ago, there was a tension building up in Lebanon, associated with political strife (between 8th & 14th of March political factions) which was about to lead to civil unrest. I felt that by taking this position as a Prime Minister (not affiliated with either 8th or 14th of March) would defuse the tension which I can humbly claim that I have achieved.

Today, with the deterioration in the Syrian situation and the political crisis prevailing, any miscalculated exit might lead to another political crisis. This is why I have called on all factions to agree on a new electoral law, which if approved, should be followed by the formation of a new government. This is the best way to secure continuity and stability in critical times.

One cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today. I am not afraid of responsibility particularly when it concerns the wellbeing of my country.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/01/23/262075.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahraini protesters continue rallies against Al Khalifa rule in Sitra**

Anti-regime protesters have once again taken to the streets in Bahrain's northeastern island of Sitra despite the ongoing crackdown by regime forces.



Bahraini police forces fired tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the angry

demonstrators who was chanting slogans against the Al Khalifa regime on Tuesday.

The protesters also demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners and voiced their solidarity with jailed political activist and religious figure, Abdul Wahab Hussein.

The regime violence against the protesters comes while Bahraini King bin Issa Al Khalifa has called for “national dialogue” with the opposition parties.

Earlier on Monday, some protesters staged overnight rallies in several villages and towns across the Persian Gulf island as a gesture of defiance against the autocratic regime.

Despite the heavy-handed crackdown on the opposition across the Persian Gulf state, the protesters continue demonstrations against the Al Khalifa regime.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285100/bahraini-protesters-hold-rallies-in-sitra/>

- **Bahrain king invites opposition parties to national dialogue**

Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa has invited all political parties to a national dialogue amid the regime's ongoing crackdown on peaceful protesters.

King Hamad issued a new directive, urging "representatives of the political societies and independent members of the political community" to restart political talks, a statement from the country's Information Affairs Authority (IAA) said late Monday.

Topics for the dialogue "will be those pending issues to be agreed upon, aiming to achieve further consensus around the political agenda," the statement added.

Bahrain's opposition has repeatedly called for a constitutional monarchy with an elected prime minister.



The major opposition bloc, Al-Wefaq, however, demanded that the two sides agree first on the participants of the talks as well as their agenda and timetable.

Al-Wefaq also called for a referendum on the creation of a constitutional court.

Earlier in July 2011, the opposition voiced frustration at the first national dialogue, known as “National Consensus Dialogue” proposed by King Hamad.

Al-Wefaq quit the first talks, arguing that since the beginning of the negotiations, the government has been trying to muffle the voice of the opposition. Al-Wefaq also regretted that the opposition has been given too small a fraction of the seats -- 35 out of 300 -- at the talks.

Al Khalifa has governed the oil-rich island for over 40 years with major backing from the United States, Britain and the neighboring Saudi Arabia. The support comes despite the regime’s record of human rights abuse, a focal point for Western countries when they want to exercise pressure on their opponents.

Despite a heavy-handed crackdown on anti-regime protests across the Persian Gulf state, the protesters continue demonstrations against the Al Khalifa regime.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285069/bahrain-invites-opposition-to-dialogue/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Karzai calls for prison torture investigation**

After initially denying charges, Kabul government forms delegation to investigate claims of Afghan prison torture.

The Afghan government has set up a delegation to investigate reports of torture in Afghan-run detention facilities.



The delegation, which was announced on Tuesday, was created two days after the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan published a report on the "ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees in Afghan custody."

The fact-finding team - including advisors from the interior ministry and the National Directorate of Security, the Afghan intelligence agency, which were both implicated in the report - will be "tasked to fully investigate the claims of torture, mistreatment, death threats and sexual abuse in prisons, and any faults or misconduct during questioning and trial of detainees."

The UN report, based on interviews with hundreds of detainees held in 89 facilities between October 2011 and October 2012, details 14 abusive practices, including the twisting of genitals, extracting fingernails and electric shock.

Perhaps most damning is a statement by an unnamed operative within the agency, who is quoted as saying "NDS has several secret places in which they detain and torture people."

Conflicted relationship

The response to the allegations has highlighted the conflicted relationship that Afghan officials have with international agencies.

The initial response upon the report's January 20 publication was denial. An NDS official, speaking to Al Jazeera on condition of anonymity, called the claims against the intelligence agency baseless.

"People say they were beaten, but where are the bruises? If we rip out people's fingernails, then show the scars. Prove it," the official said, adding that the NDS only detains "the enemies of Afghanistan."

"When people manage to speak to them alone, the stories change. They are looking to defend themselves, so they make up these false stories."

The official argued that the 635 detainees interviewed by the UN were duped by a "welcoming war" of words by critics of the Afghan government, an increasingly common narrative in Kabul.

These doubts were echoed by Aimal Faizi, a presidential spokesman. "While the Afghan government takes very seriously the allegations made in the UN report, we also question the motivations behind this report and the way it was conducted," he said.

When asked about the claim in the report that "all tortured detainees were taken out of their cells... and they were transferred to another building inside the same compound to hide them," the NDS official said countless groups have observed the agency's practices. "Anyone we interrogate, we document it all. Everything we've done is in writing."

Both the official and Faizi pointed to "numerous groups" that have observed the conditions in Afghan-run detention facilities to question the findings of the report.

A tweet sent by Faizi only hours after the report's publication said "the Red Cross and human rights groups have full access to all our detention facilities and the detainees within these facilities."

In a statement to Al Jazeera, the International Committee of the Red Cross said they have "good access to detention facilities in Afghanistan and good collaboration with Afghan and international military forces in the country."

Robin Waudo, a communications coordinator, said "if the [Red Cross] delegates witness ill-treatment first-hand while being present at a detention facility anywhere in the world, they would in every case intervene immediately and urge the authorities to put an end to it."

But Sayed Mohammad Saeq Shajjan, a Harvard law graduate now running a law firm in Kabul, said when legal and rights groups observe the conditions in the facilities, it is a closely monitored and guided process.

The president's commission, which will conduct a two-week investigation, will "also not find anything," Shajjan said. "They will only speak in front of NDS authorities, to people they are confident will not speak up against the detention authorities."

A Kabul-based judge, speaking on condition of anonymity, because he is not authorised to speak to the media, agreed.

"The NDS utilises not one, but several abusive methods to obtain information. But there is nothing we can do, no one is allowed to interfere, especially in terrorism-related cases," the judge said.

Arrest first

Shajjan said he has heard repeated stories of torture methods being used for false confessions in cases based on false accusations.

He recalled one client, Shah Mahmood, who turned to show Shajjan where the blood would drip from on his back after being lashed by ropes. "During his detention in Takhar, he was tortured

badly, he was beaten with ropes, slapped and punched," Shajjan said.

Unarmed at the time of his arrest, Shah Mahmood, an Uzbek, was accused of being a member of the Taliban by a district governor in northern Takhar province.

"The district governor wanted Shah Mahmood to divorce his wife, who was known for her beauty. After demanding he divorce his wife three times, the district governor, who wanted to marry Shah Mahmood's wife, accused Shah Mahmood of being part of the Taliban."

Shah Mahmood spent nine months in NDS detention where he was beaten on a daily basis until he would confess to being a member of the group.

In another case, Shajjan said, Asef, a Kabul resident, "was deprived of his sleep, beaten with cables, received electric shocks and hanged from his hands for anywhere from three to 12 hours at a time" while in NDS custody.

The torture led to a false confession and a 16-year sentence on allegations Asef had planted explosives in the house of a neighbour he was having a civil dispute with.

Another detainee reported threats of sexual abuse using bottles if they do not confess, a practice documented in the latest UNAMA report.

Like Shah Mahmood and Asef, Shajjan said many in NDS custody are innocent, but "they always arrest first and ask later".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/01/201312211464384935.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*

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