



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

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Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

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Batı'yla İlişkiler



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1. IRAQ

- **UNAMI delegation visits Salah-il-Din province (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Salah-il-Din (AIN) –A delegation from the UNAMI visited Samara city in Salah-il-Din province on Sunday.

The reporter of AIN stated "The delegation met a number of officials in the city and held a meeting with the attendance of Salah-il-Din Governor, Ahmed Abdullah to discuss the demonstrators' demands."

"The delegation is supposed to hold a press conference to speak about its mission and about the results of its meeting," the reporter concluded.

- **Abbawi, Busztin discuss relations with Kuwait, work of UN Mission (NINA)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Foreign Undersecretary, Labeed Abbawi, discussed with the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, George Busztin, the relations with Kuwait and the work of the UN Mission in Iraq.

In a statement to the press on Sunday, Jan. 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that in the meeting, Busztin presented a review of his recent visit to Kuwait, praising the positive bilateral relations and trust building between Iraq and Kuwait, which will work to put an end to the outstanding issues.

One the other hand, Busztin affirmed the readiness of the UN Mission (UNAMI) to participate in the activities related to this year's event (Baghdad ... the Capital of Arab Culture).

They also discussed a number of issues related to the UN Mission's work and its good relations with the Foreign Ministry.

- **Iraq MPs appeal for calm after protesters killed (AFP)**

Fallujah, Iraq, Jan 27, 2013 (AFP) - Iraqi MPs assigned to investigate the killing of eight anti-government protesters by troops appealed for calm on a visit to the town on Sunday and pledged to publish their findings within days.

Their visit to the predominantly Sunni town 60 kilometres (35 miles) west of

Baghdad came amid high tensions in the former insurgent bastion, where two soldiers were killed and three kidnapped on Saturday, a day after troops opened fire on demonstrators, killing eight.

The unrest came as lawmakers opposed to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki adopted a measure that would bar him from holding office beyond next year after weeks of angry rallies in mostly-Sunni areas against the Shiite premier's rule.

"We are sorry for what happened in Fallujah," said Shwan Mohammed Taha, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and part of a parliamentary committee assigned to investigate the unrest.

"We hope that everyone calms down until the truth becomes clear."

The shootings have dramatically ramped up tensions in Fallujah, with one Sunni Arab tribal leader giving authorities a one-week ultimatum to hand over the soldiers responsible for the killings.

Meanwhile, the head of the committee Khaled al-Attiya promised that the MPs

would submit a report within 48 hours to parliament, after reviewing evidence and hearing witness accounts.

- **Khaled Attiya: We will submit our report on the Fallujah incident to Parliament within 48 hours (NINA)**

27 Jan 2013

Ramadi / NINA / The head of the committee in charge of the Fallujah incident MP, Khaled al-Attayah said that the Commission will report back to Parliament within 48 hours.

Attayah told the reporter of the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA/ "We discussed the Fallujah incident with the officials in Anbar, the elders , notables and clerics as well as witnesses in addition to questioning security officials from the army and we will raise our report to the presidency of parliament within 48 hours .

al-Attayah said "Parliament will not tolerate with those who were involved after the investigation ends , in accordance with the law and constitution and we condemn targeting the protesters in Fallujah and we are working to uncover the whole truth and in a professional and impartial.

- **Ministerial commission stresses releasing [2,000] detainees (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The ministerial commission tasked to consider the demonstrators' demands confirmed releasing about (2000) detainees and transporting the women detainees to their provinces and referring (1714) cases to the judiciary, calling the demonstrators to send representatives to discuss their demands.

A statement by the commission received by AIN cited on Sunday "The ministerial commission, headed by the Deputy Premier, Hussein al-Shahristani, held a press conference after concluding its 9th meeting on Sunday evening."

"The commission discussed, during the meeting, the private amnesty topic which is issued through request forwarded by the convict to the Premier, then to the presidency office to be approved," noting that "The private amnesty doesn't cover the terrorists, criminals, murderers and those committed financial and administrative corruption," the statement added.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27418:](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27418)

- **Jafari: We support demonstrations, legitimate demands (NINA)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jafari, said, "We are support demonstrating and our peoples' legitimate demands."

A statement on Sunday, Jan. 27, quoted Jafari in his speech before the International Conference of Islamic Unity, being held in Tehran, saying, "The Government in the service of the people, Parliament in the service of the people, the judiciary in the service of the people, everything in the service of the people and we support our peoples' legitimate demands."

He added, "Demonstrating is an expression of the public opinion, who chooses the government through ballots, and criticize the government; yet we trust that the people realize the dangers surrounding the demonstrations, by not allowing the Baath to infiltrate them."

As for the Arab Spring, Jafari said, "We impatiently waited for the Spring, but, regrettably some countries are afflicted by some defects."

- **Iraqi MP says government to continue political reform (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

27 Jan 2013

State of Law Coalition MP Khalid al-Asadi has said that the government will continue carrying out political and administrative reform and achieving the protesters' demands, regardless to the positions of the political blocs towards the government and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Al-Asadi added that the National Alliance called upon the government to achieve the protesters' demands within the framework of its authority and according to the law. Al-Asadi pointed out that the NA and the SLC will continue their efforts to issue the general pardon bill after approving its amendments in order to guarantee excluding the terrorists, the murderers of Iraqi people, and those involved in corruption.

- **Iraqi coalition condemns the kidnapping of soldiers in Anbar (NINA)**

27 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD / NINA / Iraqiya coalition condemned kidnapping elements of the Iraqi Army in Anbar by infiltrators seeking to divert the peaceful demonstrations, which express the legitimate demands of the people in justice and put an end to the marginalization and discrimination.

Iraqiya coalition urged in a press statement today 27. Jan the citizens to commit in the peaceful and civilized means to express their demands and block the way for those who are fishing in troubled.

It is worth mentioning that two soldiers were killed by sniper and four others were kidnapped in different parts of Fallujah.

A security source told the reporter of the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that a soldier was killed by sniper in the complex apartment area , north of Fallujah, another soldier was killed by sniper in Nuaimiya area south of Fallujah.

He added: 4 soldiers, traveling in a civilian car heading to Baghdad, were abducted by an armed groups, traveling in a three cars in Nuaimiya area south of Fallujah.

- **Current demonstrations penetrated by foreign destructive agendas, says Sayhoud (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mohamed al-Sayhoud of the State of Law Coalition stressed that "Some demands of the demonstrators are supported by foreign agendas that aim at aborting the political process in Iraq."

Sayhoud stated to All Iraq News Agency "The demonstrators are divided into two parts, the first part represents the ordinary people while the second one stands for the foreign agendas represented by internal sides of Baath Party, Qaeda Organization and the Iraqi Islamic Party who receive support from regional countries including Turkey and Qatar."

"The second part try to exploit the demonstrations to pass their slogans that aim to foil the constitution and abort the current Iraqi regime," he confirmed.

Sayhoud argued that "The problem is not with Maliki himself and replacing him by another figure but those sides do not want any statesman from the Iraqi National Alliance." /End/

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27403

- **White Bloc: Regional agendas seek to ignite sectarian strife (NINA)**

27 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD / NINA / The spokesman of the White bloc, Kadhem Al-Shammari said that "The Iraqis are obviously know that there are regional agendas seeking to ignite sectarian strife to tear the unity of Iraqi."

He added in a press statement today 27, Jan: "The Iraqis, in different sects and denominations agree that Iraq's unity is a red line, such as the sanctity of Iraqi blood, and they are aware the lesson of 2006 and they will not accept marketing regional agendas, which aim, in this period, to fabricate clashes between the Iraqi army and protesters" .

He stressed that Iraq is undergoing in serious crisis, threatening its unity and its future, and the demonstrators and government alike must miss the opportunity to those who want to dismemberment and divide Iraq.

- **Araji: extremist figures seek to address crisis through splitting Iraq or creating civil war (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the parliamentary Ahrar bloc, Baha al-Araji confirmed that "The current crisis in Iraq is a state crisis rather than being government or parliament crisis, and all the political blocs have part in the crisis so it must be settled through dialogue."

Araji reported in a statement receive by AIN on Sunday "His regret over the statements of some extremist political figures who talk about possibility of addressing the crisis through splitting Iraq or through the civil war."

He added "Preserving Iraq's unity is the responsibility of all, but the sides which believe in splitting the country to address the crisis seek to achieve cheap interests."

"The masses' demands are not restricted to provinces of Anbar, Mosul, but Basra, Nasiriya, Amara, Najaf, Karbala and other provinces also have demands, therefore all bear responsibility to cope wisely with this situation," Araji concluded.

- **Parliament to vote on Federal Court law in next Monday's session (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The parliament will vote on a number of law drafts, during its Monday session, including the Federal Court law that has been postponed since weeks due to the disputes among the political blocs.

A statement by the parliament media office received by AIN cited "Monday parliament session will involve vote on the Federal Court law and the first reading of Ministry of Health law in as well as other law."

"The session will witness conducting the second reading of another law in addition to discussing the environmental situation in the country and the Haj report," the statement concluded.

- **Iraqiya Slate denies reports over boycotting parliament sessions (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The parliamentary bloc of the Iraqiya Coalition denied the reports over boycotting the parliament regular sessions except those related to discussing the withdrawal of confidence from the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki.

A statement by the agency cited "Some media outlets have reported on last Saturday imprecise news saying that the IS would not attend the parliament's sessions but those concerning withdrawing confidence from Maliki."

"The MPs of the IS parliamentary bloc will attend all the sessions that concern the citizens' interests and meet the demonstrators' demands and safeguard justice and stability to our country," the statement concluded.

<http://www.alliraqnews.com>

- **Sistani calls to solve problems according to constitution (Aswat al-Iraq)**

27 Jan 2013

NAJAF/ Aswat al-Iraq: Renowned Higher Shiite Clergyman called today to "preserve the blood of the Iraqi people and not to drag the country into denominational fighting".

In a short statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, he called all political components to sit together to solve the questions according to the Iraqi constitution.

Demonstrations took dangerous trend after the killing of five in Fallujah which led to increasing tension between the public and the armed forces.

- **"Parliament violates constitutional and legal framework"- Al-Sayhud (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

27 Jan 2013

SLC MP Muhammad Sa'dun al-Sayhud has accused the parliament of violating the constitutional and legal framework, pointing out that it became a centre for settling political accounts among the political blocs.

Al-Sayhud pointed out that the parliament marches in a wrong direction that aims to

corrupt the political process, through the endorsement of the draft law on limiting the terms of office of the three presidencies.

- **Iraqiya rejects granting "obligatory vacation" to its ministers (Aswat al-Iraq)**

27 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc, headed by Iyad Alawi, rejected the decision taken by Premier Nouri al-Maliki to grant its ministers "obligatory vacation" as "legally groundless".

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, Spokeswoman Maysoon al-Damalouji said that the bloc's ministers were not absent from their duties, but did not attend the Cabinet session for their rejection of "neglect policies" practiced by the government

The bloc announced Saturday it is boycotting the parliament session, except those connected with the withdrawal of confidence from the government and connected with the demands of the demonstrators.

- **Kurdish MP describes Iraqi Parliament as "inactive" (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mahma Khalil of the Kurdistan Alliance described the Iraqi Parliament's efforts to address the current crisis as not at the required level, accusing the government of infringing the people's rights.

Khalil stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "Despite the efforts being exerted to settle the crisis yet they do not meet the aspiration where the parliament's role is absent from running the state affairs."

He pointed out that "The Iraqi Constitution states that the political regime in Iraq is a parliamentary regime where all the state institutions emerge from the parliament, however its role in managing the county's affairs is weak."

- **Sadrist MP calls on Iraqi judiciary to stick to neutrality (alliraqnews)**

27 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mohamed Ridha al-Khafaji of the Ahrar bloc within the Sadr Trend called the judicial authority to stick to neutrality and keep away from the

executive authority and the ruling political party's interference.

Khafaji stated to all Iraq News Agency "The Federal Court is the only part which has the power to interpret the controversial articles of the constitution if there are disagreements over them among the political sides."

"We see that the judiciary is exploited by some political blocs and by the ruling political party in particular where there are a lot of files still unsettled for more than eight years especially those files related to the citizens' affairs," he concluded.

- **Call to expose foreign agendas, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

27 Jan 2013

KARBALA/ Aswat al-Iraq: Al-Muwatin (The Citizen) bloc MP said that the attacks against the minorities in Iraq are "preplanned machinations to empty Iraq of its components".

MP Habeeb al-Tarfi, affiliate to the Higher Islamic Council, told Aswat al-Iraq that "there is a plan to attack ethnic Iraqi components, as done with the Christians

and the Izidis, but now they are planning to attack the Turkmen".

He pointed out that continued explosions in Touzkhormato mean "to empty the country of this Turkmen component".

2. IRAN

- **Iran, Argentina Agree on Amia Follow-Up Framework**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and his Argentinean counterpart Hector Marcos Timerman continued discussions over the 1994 bombing at the Amia Jewish center, and agreed on a framework to follow-up the case.

Salehi and Timerman made the agreement during their meeting held on the sidelines of the 20th Summit of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Sunday.

In a statement issued at the end of their meeting, the two top diplomats announced that the agreement was the product of several meetings and rounds of talks held at experts and foreign ministerial levels.

Salehi and Timerman reiterated their determination to verify the case and shed light on the truth in Amia case through mutual cooperation and assistance of independent lawyers.

The US and Israeli rulers accuse Iran of bombing a Buenos Aires Jewish center in 1994, killing 84 people. But 18 years of effort have failed to advance the case or prove anything against Iran, indicating that Iran is innocent.

In October, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that transparent talks between Tehran and Buenos Aires over the 1994 bombing at the Amia Jewish center would reveal the realities and pave the ground for the improvement of the relations between the two countries.

"The two (Iranian and Argentine) foreign ministers recently met and agreed to coordinate the rest of the path. We think studying this issue should definitely result in transparency and finding the reality," the Iranian president told the media in a press conference in Tehran at the time.

"I am sure that when investigations take place in an accurate and impartial

manner, then the grounds will be prepared for the expansion of ties between Iran and Argentina," Ahmadinejad stressed.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107139449>

- **Iran Starts Mass-Production of Ya Zahra Air Defense System**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian Defense Ministry started mass production of an advanced home-made air defense missile system.

The production line of Ya Zahra air defense missile system was officially inaugurated on Sunday in a special ceremony attended by Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi.

Addressing the ceremony, Vahidi said that the system has completed the chain of self-sufficiency in designing and producing short-range air defense systems.

"The air defense weapon is capable of identifying, intercepting and destroying aerial targets, including different types of aircraft, choppers and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)," Vahidi said.



He further stated that Ya Zahra is a mobile system and can be linked to the country's integrated air defense network and is capable of engaging and destroying several aerial targets simultaneously and also has a powerful fast reaction and full detection capabilities.

In November, different systems with the capability of intercepting incoming cruise missiles as well as optimized and indigenized 'Ya Zahra 3' missiles were tested in the massive aerial exercises code-named "Modafe'an-e Aseman-e Velayat 4 (Defenders of Velayat Skies 4).

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the wargames, Commander of Khatam ol-Anbia Air Defense Base Brigadier General Farzad Esmayeelii said Ya Zahra-III is a low-altitude missile system.

"This low-altitude missile system has been designed and produced in a short period

of time based on domestic needs. Ya Zahra missile system's capabilities include deployment under all types of weather conditions and on different lands as well as its mobility."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107139345>

- **Iran's Foreign Trade Surpasses \$78bln in 10 Months despite Sanctions**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's foreign trade exceeded \$78bln during the first ten months of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2012-January 20, 2013) despite the sanctions and restrictions imposed by the West on Iran's economy.

Iran exported \$34.383 worth of non-oil goods, and imported \$43.768bln worth of products in the said period.

Propane, urea and methanol were Iran's main export commodities, and Iraq, China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Afghanistan and India were the main importers of Iranian non-oil goods.

Meantime, Iron and steel ingots, wheat, corn fodder, rice and soybean meal were the main commodities imported.



Many Iranian officials believe that the West's ban on Iranian oil supplies will help Iranian economy end its dependence on oil revenues.

Senior Iranian officials underlined Tehran's intention to further reduce its dependence on oil revenues, and said the country is exporting its non-oil products to over 151 world states now.

Iranian officials have underlined that the country plans to increase its non-oil exports to over \$70bln in the current Iranian year.

Late in December 2011, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad lauded the country's growing non-oil exports, and said Iran's non-oil exports would equal its imports in the current Iranian year.

"God willing, non-oil exports will equal (Iran's) imports by the end of 1391 (march

19, 2013)," he said, adding, "That would be a great revolution in the country's economy."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107139433>

- **Iranian Energy Minister Conveys Ahmadinejad's Message to Karzai**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Energy Minister Majid Namjou, who is on an official visit to Kabul, submitted a message from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai.

In his message, President Ahmadinejad has underlined the necessity for Iranian companies' more active participation and partnership in Afghanistan's water and power sectors, and called on Kabul officials to pave the way for these companies' increased presence and operation in Afghanistan.

In his meeting with President Karzai on Sunday, Namjou also discussed mutual cooperation in different economic fields, including water and electricity.



The Iranian energy minister arrived in Afghanistan today to discuss further expansion of ties and energy cooperation between the two nations.

During his stay in Afghanistan, Namjou also attended the inaugural ceremony of two Iranian-made electric turbines today.

Two diesel turbines with the power generation capacities of 25 megawatts became operational on Sunday. Afghanistan's Energy and Water Minister Ismail Khan was also present at the inaugural ceremony of the Iranian-made electric turbines.

Namjou described his meeting with Afghan Energy and Water Minister Ismail Khan as positive and constructive.

Iran has helped Afghanistan in upgrading g its electricity system and half of Herat city's electricity needs are supplied by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran is one of the most important donors to Afghanistan which has kept its promises to help to the reconstruction of the war-hit country.

Iran has built some roads, power transmission lines, and border stations, among the other infrastructure projects which would better link the two nations.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107139451>

- **Switzerland, Kazakhstan ready to host Iran-P5+1 talks: Salehi**



Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says Switzerland and Kazakhstan have also expressed their readiness to host the next round of the multifaceted talks between Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers.

The Iranian foreign minister added Iran and the P5+1 were discussing the resumption of the talks.

Salehi made the remarks during a press conference in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa on the sidelines of the 20th African Union (AU) Summit on Sunday.

Earlier, Salehi said Egypt had welcomed Tehran's proposal for Cairo to host the next round of the talks between the Islamic Republic and the P5+1.

Iran and the P5+1 - comprising Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany - have held several rounds of talks with a focus on Iran's nuclear energy program. The last round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 was held in Moscow in June, 2012.

On January 25, European Union deputy foreign policy chief Helga Schmid called for the postponement of the next round of Iran-P5+1 talks to February, saying the six major world powers were not ready to negotiate with the Islamic Republic this month.

Tehran has announced that it welcomes the readiness of the six major world powers to hold constructive talks with Iran.

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

Iran has categorically rejected the allegation, 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 acquire and develop 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 the Iranian nuclear program has been diverted toward military objectives.

www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/28/28594/2/more-states-ready-to-host-p51-talks/

- **Iran to sue Azerbaijan over oil pollution in Caspian Sea**

An Iranian environmental official says Tehran will file a lawsuit against Azerbaijan if Baku does nothing to stop increasing oil pollution in the Caspian Sea.

Deputy Head of Iran Department of Environment for Marine Environment Abdolreza Karbasi said on Sunday that Iran would lodge a complaint if British oil and gas giant, BP, continues polluting the Caspian Sea.



BP simply dumps waste oil into the Caspian Sea waters instead of injecting it into the depth of 600 meters below the surface, he stated.

Karbasi added that Azerbaijan-triggered oil spills in the Caspian Sea have minimized the chances for the survival of aquatic creatures in the sea.

He noted that the southern coastlines of the Caspian Sea have been covered with

oil slicks over the past few years with the last such incident happening four months ago, when about 25 tons of crude oil was cleared from Iranian shores.

An increase in oil pollution in maritime environment will gradually decrease the oxygen content available to aquatic animals, leading to their death, Karbasi stated.

Over the past two decades, the Caspian Sea has become increasingly exposed to the risk of pollution from oil and gas exploration and transport.

According to head of the Caspian Sea Ecological Research Institute Reza Pourgholam, the level of industrial and oil pollution in the sea has reached a "critical" level.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/27/285888/iran-to-sue-baku-over-caspian-pollution/>

- **Iran ready to send aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan**

Iran Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Tehran is ready to send humanitarian

aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan via the Red Crescent Society.



The Iranian official made the remarks in a meeting with the Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Joudeh in Amman on Sunday.

Discussing regional developments with the Jordanian official, Amir-Abdollahian praised Amman's stance on Syria, saying that foreign meddling is the reason for the situation in the country becoming more complicated.

Amir-Abdollahian added that Western countries and the United States are the main sponsors of terrorist groups in Syria because they arm militants who are destroying Syrian infrastructure.

Since mid-March 2011, Syria has been experiencing a deadly unrest, which has killed many people including large numbers of security personnel.

The prolonged violence in the Arab country has forced many of its citizens as well as Palestinian refugees in the country to leave for neighboring states such as Jordan.

On Wednesday, Iran's first consignment of humanitarian aid was delivered to Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

According to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, some 150,000 people coming from Syria have taken refuge in Lebanon over the past months.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/27/285887/iran-to-send-aid-to-syrians-in-jordan/>

- **Iran and Argentina agree truth commission for AMIA**

TEHRAN, Jan. 28 (MNA) –Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Minister says he and his Argentinean counterpart have agreed on the framework for investigating the AMIA case.

On the side line of the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Ali Akbar Salehi and Hector Timmerman have made

the announcement about AMIA incident; the parties met several occasions, and talked at expert level to agree The Foreign Ministers stressed that the two countries have strongly resolute to find out what the truth is and bring this case to a closure and also stressed on using the assistance of independent legal experts, in their Press release.

Salehi and Timerman hoped that the memorandum of understanding for the Truth Commission after the approval by relevant officials of both countries, will achieve complete resolution of this matter.

AMIA is one of the lengthiest international court cases, which Argentina was under pressure from Israel to show Iranian involvement, without presenting any single legal evidence.

But Iran has rejected the allegation repeatedly and has blamed Israel for making a false flagged operation in AMIA bombing, with two specific goals in mind;
1- Putting the blame on Iran for the incident, since Iran is against Israeli regime, and also Iranian Jews are living

peacefully in Iran with all citizenship rights.

2- Preventing the Israeli Jews from travelling to Argentina, since Palestinian Intifada. Argentina hosts the largest Jewish community in Latin America.

After reports about false flagged operation on 9/11 in New York, which showed Israel's role in the blast, Iran is giving more possibility of an Israeli involvement in the AMIA case.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1802477>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Watchdog: Israel using deadly force on unarmed protesters**

RAMALLAH (Reuters) -- Israel is breaking its own rules of engagement by using deadly force to disperse unarmed Palestinian protesters in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli rights group B'Tselem reported on Monday.

Israeli forces have killed 56 people since 2005 in clashes with rock-throwing Palestinians, said B'Tselem, which accused the military of having "extensively and

systematically violated" rules barring deadly retaliation for non-lethal assault.

"The Israeli military's standing orders explicitly state that live ammunition may not be fired at stone-throwers," it said.

Last week, Israeli forces shot dead two Palestinians from Bethlehem.

On Wednesday, 15-year-old Salih al-Amarin, from Azza refugee camp, died in hospital after Israeli forces shot him in the head during clashes in Bethlehem a few days earlier.

The same day, Lubna Hanash, 22, was shot in the head when Israeli soldiers in a civilian car opened fire at a group standing at the entrance to al-Arrub refugee camp south of Bethlehem.

The Israeli army said the B'Tselem report "presents a biased narrative, relying primarily on incidents that are either old or still under investigation by the Military Police."



"The (army) does everything in its power to ensure that the use of riot dispersal means is done in accordance with the rules of engagement," the military said in a written response sent to Reuters.

Of the Palestinian fatalities since 2005, six were killed by rubber-coated metal bullets and two by teargas canisters, both supposedly non-lethal weapons which were fired directly at protesters, B'Tselem said.

"In practice, members of the security forces make almost routine use of these weapons in unlawful, dangerous ways, and the relevant Israeli authorities do too little to prevent the recurrence of this conduct," the report said.

The other 48 protesters killed were hit by live ammunition, according to the group.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=559815>

- **DFLP: Party chief will not return to Palestine**



BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The secretary-general of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine Nayif Hawatmah will not return from Syria to the West Bank, despite reports to this effect, his party said on Sunday.

Hawatmah is the last veteran PLO leader still in exile.

Israel stipulated that the DFLP renounce armed struggle in exchange for the return of Hawatmah, and the party has rejected this condition, Talal Abu Tharifa, a member of the DFLP politburo, told Ma'an.

The group believes both armed struggle and political activity are necessary, he said.

The Beirut-based al-Liwaa newspaper quoted unidentified Palestinian sources on Thursday saying that 84-year-old Hawatmah's return from exile was imminent.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=559803>

- **Palestinian press group urges Hamas to release journalists**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate on Sunday called on Hamas to release 6 journalists detained in a media crackdown in Gaza last week.

The Palestinian syndicate, together with other journalists, held a protest in front of the press group's headquarters in Al-Bireh, which was attended by members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Fatah's Central Committee, a Ma'an correspondent said.

Abdel Nasser al-Najjar, head of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, said during a speech that the journalists must

be released, adding that their arrests come at a very sensitive time for political reconciliation.

Fatah leader Tawfiq Tirawi said that journalists have long struggled against Israel's occupation and stressed the need to immediately release those detained by Hamas, and to end all political arrests.

The Palestinian syndicate says Hamas forces launched the crackdown last Sunday, raiding the homes of journalists and detaining them over a 48-hour period.

The journalists are Abdul Karim Hajji, Hussein Abdel-Gawad Karsou, Bassam Darwich, Ashraf Abu Khasewan, Mustafa Mekdad and Jumua Abu Shoumer, it said.

On Sunday, Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said he would look into the cases of those arrested and make a decision about them, a statement from his office said.



'Those persons are not journalists'

The International Federation of Journalists on Thursday accused the security forces in Gaza of launching a major crackdown on the media.

"The climate of sheer brutality and ruthless intimidation targeting media in Gaza has again shown that Hamas is no friend of press freedom," said IFJ president Jim Boumelha, in a statement.

Hamas has repeatedly targeted the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate in the years since taking power in 2007, and has sought to replace its membership with Hamas-affiliated media.

On Wednesday, the Hamas government flatly denied arresting any journalists, a Ma'an correspondent said after a meeting with interior ministry officials in Gaza City.

A statement from the interior ministry said that "The summons of a number of persons with different jobs was to question them on certain issues that threaten the security of the community."

It added: "Those persons are not journalists at all. Even those who work as journalists use this field as a cover to carry out suspicious acts."

The journalists are employees of al-Katab satellite channel, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, the websites Fatah Youth and Aswar press, and al-Hurriya radio as well as other news outlets.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=559744>

- **UN Official says Two-State Solution Slipping Away**

NEW YORK, January 24, 2013 (Wafa) – United Nations special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, Robert Serry, Wednesday told a meeting of the Security Council that the two-state solution is gradually slipping away.

"We are entering a critical period ahead, in which concerted action will be vital if

we are to salvage the two-state solution," he told the Council members.

Serry raised questions about 'the effectiveness of international efforts to bring about decisive results.' He expressed his genuine concern that "a clear and realistic path is still lacking."

The UN official reiterated his organization's intention to remain an integral part of efforts to urgently address "the dangerous political vacuum," and the willingness to work with any initiative that will achieve the international community's common goal, including in the context of the Quartet.

Serry urged the Palestinians and Israelis to "abstain from actions that will make efforts to resume meaningful negotiations even harder in the period ahead."

He also noted worrying trends on the ground, including continued Israeli settlement construction and increased violence, and the seriously weakened capacity of the Palestinian Authority to meet its financial obligations.

He called on Israel to restore the timely, predictable and transparent transfers of tax and customs revenues without further delay. He also called on Members of the Arab League to urgently provide financial assistance in accordance with pledged commitments of December 9.

Serry warned “we should be under no illusion that the viability of the Palestinian Authority will be increasingly at stake if its standing is based on political 'quick-sand'. Ultimately, there is no future for the Palestinian Authority without a two-state solution.”

On Gaza, Serry noted that the calm brokered by Egypt in November has largely held, but remains tenuous.

Significantly, he said, no rockets or mortar shells landed in Israel in the reporting period.

The UN will remain engaged in Egyptian-led efforts to further progress on all aspects of the implementation of the ceasefire, he said.

He also emphasized that progress on the implementation of SCR 1860 also means overcoming the Palestinian divide.

“The peace process and reconciliation is not an ‘either-or’ proposition and must be made compatible by advancing both in a mutually reinforcing way,” he said.

Serry concluded that “the consequences for inaction could be dire for everyone. Therefore the parties must not only remain open to new initiatives to overcome the current impasse, but they must also demonstrate their seriousness.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21558>

- **Police Removes Protest Tent in a Jerusalem Neighborhood**

JERUSALEM, January 24, 2013 (WAFA) – Israeli police Thursday removed a tent a Palestinian had set up on his land in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Shufat to protest an Israel plan to seize the land to build a road that would serve area settlements, said a relative of the landowner.

Majd Abu Nee told Wafa that three Israeli police jeeps raided the area and told the landowner, Amer Abu Nee, that he should remove the tent and when he refused, the police took it down and confiscated it. The landowner was given an order to report to a police station for interrogation.

Abu Nee said the family had taken an oath not to leave their land under any condition. "We will stay on our land and keep building tents to protect it," he said.

The tent, which the family has named the Olive Steadfast tent, was erected on Tuesday to protest a plan by the West Jerusalem Israeli municipality to seize 117 dunums of Shufat and nearby Beit Hanina land to build a road that would connect illegal settlements to the east and west of the neighborhoods.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21559>

- **Yishai: Shas isn't afraid of being in the opposition**

Shas triumvirate leader Eli Yishai asserted Monday that his party is not afraid of being in the opposition.

In an interview with Israel Radio, Yishai said that Shas has been in the opposition before, and returned stronger to the coalition.

However, he asserted that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu wants a wide coalition and he wants Shas in it.



Addressing the issue of equalizing the burden, Yishai said Shas is willing to come to an agreement, but that it will not happen by force.

"It is a great mitzva to make a respectable living and there are thousands of haredim waiting to enter national service and academic studies. "The haredi public is flexible and open, and many want to joint the army," he said.

He added, however, that the process must be conducted in an organized, agreed-upon manner.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=301224>

- **Gov't approves plan for disputed Beduin lands**

The government on Sunday approved a plan for dealing with the issue of disputed Beduin communities in the Negev as well as for opening certain areas to new settlements by a vote of 16-3-1, the Prime Minister's Office said.

In what the Prime Minister's Office characterized as "a compromise" which was "vital," 62 percent of land claimed by Beduin will remain under their control, while 38% will be recognized as state land and any Beduin structures which remain on it will be demolished if necessary, Israel Radio reported.

Related:

Court rejects 6 Beduin Negev land lawsuits

Rights groups: Israel ignoring Beduin land claims

The government decision both stipulates that those Beduin being relocated will receive compensation, and lays the

groundwork for new Jewish settlements in the Negev.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said, "The goal of this historic decision is to put an end to the spread of illegal building by Negev Beduin and lead to the better integration of the Beduin into Israeli society. All governments have avoided dealing with this issue, but this brave decision will facilitate the continued development and prosperity of the Negev, for the benefit of all its residents."

The press release said that the Beduin have five years to accept the plan before their claims to land become null and void.

Negative reactions to the decision were swift from both sides of the debate.

On one side, critics say that Israel's modern way of life should not be imposed on the Beduin more than they wish and that it is unjust to take away their historic lands regardless of how poorly some of their land claims may be documented.

On the other side, the plan is viewed as too generous, rewarding the Beduin for building "illegally" without permits and for

being unwilling to agree to any boundaries.

An Israel Radio report said that a Beduin representative opposed any arrangement other than full government recognition of all of their communities, with no forced relocation.

In expectation of the decision, Adalah representative Dr. Tavat Abu Ras said that the details on the ground were tricky and that in the end the Beduins would “still lose most of their land in return for symbolic recognition of a few villages.”

The head of the Omer council said that it showed “that when you press, you receive,” suggesting the Beduin had protested loudly enough that the government had caved in to most of their demands, said the report.

Ironically, the government decision came a day after the announcement that the High Court of Justice had rejected a petition by Regavim to scrap that very decision for giving up too much land which could be used for future Jewish settlement.

The High Court rejected Regavim’s petition largely based on the fact that at the time of both the filing and the hearing, there had been no official government decision that could be opposed.

Nevertheless, the High Court’s reasoning left wide open the possibility of filing a new petition.

There is also a possibility that the Beduin communities and some of the human rights groups fighting on their side will also petition the High Court against the government decision.

The decision also said NIS 1.2 billion would be invested in revitalizing Beduin communities.

<http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=301195>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt's Morsi declares state of emergency in Suez Canal cities**

Egypt President Mohamed Morsi declares a state of emergency in Port Said, Suez and Ismailia in the wake of deadly clashes, calls for dialogue with opposition

Egypt President Mohamed Morsi has on Sunday declared a 30-day state of emergency in Port Said, Suez and Ismailia, the three governorates which have witnessed deadly clashes since the second anniversary of the Egyptian revolution on 25 Jan.

During a speech broadcast on state television, the under-fire Morsi has also said a curfew will be imposed in the three cities from 9 pm to 6 am during the duration of the emergency state in an attempt to curb increasing violence.

The Islamist president's decisions take effect from Monday.

"I always said I'm against any exceptional measures, but I also said I might resort to such measures if I had to. I may even do more for the sake of Egypt, it's my duty," a glum-looking Morsi added.

Morsi was criticised by his opponents for what they perceived as his poor reaction to nationwide clashes that left dozens dead, including more than 30 in restive city Port Said.

Anger boiled in the coastal city over a court verdict that sentenced 21 football fans to death after they were convicted of killing the supporters of Cairo-based club Ahly in last year's infamous disaster in Port Said.

Clashes are still ongoing in Port Said, with angry protesters and police forces reportedly firing gunshots at each other. Army was deployed in Port Said and Suez, another city which is a scene of constant confrontations, but it has so far failed to contain the growing violence.

"I instructed interior ministry officials to strictly deal with whoever threatens the people, public and private institutions. Everybody should be aware that Egypt's institutions are capable of defending the country against any threats," Morsi added.

Morsi, who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood, also saluted the army and police for "their efforts to protect the country".

"The recent acts have nothing to do with the revolution, they are against the law and incited by counter revolution. The Egyptian people reject such actions, which

are condemned by honorable revolutionaries," he said.

National Dialogue



Morsi has also reiterated calls for national dialogue, which he described as necessary to overcome the ongoing turmoil that has plunged Egypt into deep economic and political crises.

"We have no option but to engage in a dialogue, this is the only way to pass the current phase and achieve stability," he stated.

"I decided to invite the political figures for a national dialogue tomorrow."

The National Salvation front, Egypt's main opposition, listed five demands that included forming a new government and amending the "distorted constitution", which was approved by around 64 per

cent of Egyptian voters in a national referendum last month.

Opposition says the new constitution does not fulfill the goals of the revolution because it "disregards" the rights of women and the minorities, including Christians who make up about 10% of Egypt's population.

Morsi supporters believe the new constitution puts Egypt on the right path to democracy.

The Brotherhood, oppressed for decades by military strongmen, propelled Morsi into power in Egypt's first free elections last year.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/63454/Egypt/Politics-/Egypst-Morsi-declares-state-of-emergency-in-Suez-C.aspx>

- **Egypt's National Salvation Front sets five demands for President Morsi**

Egypt's main opposition grouping will boycott parliamentary elections unless its stated demands are met



Egypt's main opposition grouping, the National Salvation Front (NSF), has urged President Mohamed Morsi to respond positively to five demands announced by the group or face mass peaceful protests.

In a statement released Saturday following an emergency meeting by front leaders in Cairo, the NSF said:

1. The NSF mourns the martyrs of the January 25 Revolution's second wave in Suez, Port Said, Ismailia and all Egyptians squares. We hold the president responsible for the excessive violence used by security forces against protesters, demanding that a neutral investigative committee be formed to punish those responsible for the bloodshed. We further call upon Egyptians to continue their peaceful protests, and condemn all acts of violence.

2. We call for the formation of neutral legal committee to amend the distorted constitution and to reach a consensus on articles that needs to be changed immediately.

3. We demand the formation of a national salvation government that ensures efficiency and credibility, that will implement the demands of the revolution, particularly social justice after the policy of the president and Cabinet has led to a deterioration in the lives of Egyptians.

4. Halting the tyrannical constitutional declaration concerning its aggression on judicial independence and the sacking of the public prosecutor.

5. The Muslim Brotherhood group should be subject to the law after being a main element in the country's administration for almost a year with no legal or legitimate foundation.

The NSF stressed that if their "legitimate" demands were not met in the coming days, the front would call on Egyptians to peacefully protest next Friday to topple the "invalid" constitution and to readopt temporarily the 1971 Constitution.

The front further demanded that an early date be set for new presidential elections.

“The NSF has decided not to run in the parliamentary elections unless a comprehensive solution similar to that suggested is reached,” added the statement.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/63343/Egypt/Politics-/Egypst-National-Salvation-Front-sets-five-demands-.aspx>

- **Port Said death toll reaches 38**

Thousands during funeral of Port Said victims, 27 January 2013. Violent clashes erupted in Port Said following verdict of Port Said massacre.

Health Ministry and hospital sources put the death toll from violence in Port Said at 38. Another victim died Sunday after being shot during clashes the day before, Abdel Rahman Farag, senior health official at the Port Said branch of the Health Ministry, said.

Farag told private satellite channel Al-Hayat that 457 people were injured Sunday, with 419 people suffering from tear gas inhalation and 38 sustaining injuries from live bullets and birdshot.

Four people were killed during violence Sunday, a day after clashes first broke out, according to state news agency MENA.

Ahmed al-Gayar of Port Said Hospital said two of the four bodies the hospital received Sunday had been shot during the funeral for victims of the Saturday clashes, while the two other victims had died during clashes around the city’s prison and police station.

A medical source at Canal Hospital had said earlier that another man was shot Saturday and died from the wounds Sunday.

Two of the 37 killed were police officers.



Earlier, Al-Masry Al-Youm had reported that Ahmed Mohamed, 22, was the first fatality Sunday after the victims of Saturday's clashes had been buried. He was shot and killed Sunday during clashes between security forces and protesters trying to break into a police station.

Another one of the victims killed, Mohamed Ibrahim Mahmoud, 18, was admitted to the hospital after being wounded by a bullet. He was transferred to Ismailia Teaching Hospital, when his condition deteriorated.

Scores of injured victims suffered tear gas inhalation, and 17 sustained injuries from birdshot or live bullets. Military-owned clubs also were set on fire during the clashes.

The situation escalated in Port Said Sunday after the funeral of 29 victims of

clashes that broke out following a court recommended death sentences for 21 people convicted of involvement in the Port Said Stadium violence last year, in which 72 football fans died.

General Ahmed Wasfy, commander of the 2nd Field Army, said Sunday that the Armed Forces and police were cooperating to restore order in the city, according to Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper.

Wasfy said he inspected the securing of Port Said prison, the electricity company and police stations to make sure both troops and citizens were safe from violence, particularly during the victims' funeral, the paper reported.

www.egyptindependent.com/news/update-port-said-death-toll-reaches-38

- **Muslim Brotherhood member shot dead in Libya**

Sheikh Mohamed bin Othman, a Muslim Brotherhood and government official, was shot dead in the Libyan city of Misrata

A Muslim Brotherhood official and member of the local council from Misrata

shot dead as he left a mosque in the Libyan city, a local source told AFP on Sunday.

"Sheikh Mohamed bin Othman was shot dead as he left a mosque after prayers" on Saturday, the source said on the condition of anonymity.

"Unknown gunmen fired shots from a car with tinted windows" at Othman before fleeing, the source added, citing witnesses.

The funeral for Othman, a former political prisoner under the regime of Muammar Gaddafi and a founding member of the Justice and Construction Party, which was launched by the Brotherhood in Libya, will be held later Sunday.

The party described the killing of Othman as a "serious prelude to sow chaos and confusion" as it called for "national solidarity... to consolidate the state institutions and the rule of law" in Libya. Libyan state news agency Lana said those who carried out the attack were not yet identified.

Misrata, a port city in east Libya, is relatively untouched so far by the violence and killings that has rocked Benghazi, cradle of the revolt that toppled Gaddafi's regime in 2011.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63448/World/Region/-Muslim-Brotherhood-member-shot-dead-in-Libya.aspx>

- **Opposition Rally Draws Thousands**

Thousands of supporters of the prominent opposition party Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia) gathered for a political rally today, January 27, to mark the one-year anniversary of party-founder Beji Caied Essebsi's scathing public statement on the political environment in Tunisia since the nation's first free elections in 2011.

At today's rally, Essebsi reiterated his disappointment with the leading political parties and criticized Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali for canceling a planned cabinet reshuffle expected yesterday.

"[it] was frustrating," said Essebsi, the former Tunisian prime minister under the first transitional government credited with

organizing the first elections. “We are worried about the future.”

Essebsi’s statement of January 26, 2012, marked his return to the political scene. In June 2012, he officially announced the birth of Nidaa Tounes, which has grown into a leading opposition party.

The rally, staged to resemble a spiritual celebration in a mausoleum, retained a festive atmosphere as supporters, encouraged by the large turnout, waved Tunisian flags and chanted “O Beji, O Beji!” The crowd sang along and danced during a musical performance prior to Essebsi’s speech to commemorate Tunisian saints, especially Sidi Bou Saied el Beji, whose shrine in the upscale eponymous Tunis suburb was destroyed by assailants earlier this month.

In his speech, Essebsi evaluated the process of transitional democracy that Tunisia has been undergoing since the uprisings of 2011. He praised Tunisians for successfully holding the National Constituent Assembly elections, which ushered the moderate Islamist party Ennahda into power.

“The elections took us halfway through the democratic transition. But democracy is not just the elections,” he said. “It’s about peaceful transfer of power and it’s about keeping the political scene balanced.”

The speech was followed by a press conference, in which members of the executive office of Nidaa Tounes answered journalists’ questions. Workshops related to the party’s economic and social agenda and a closing musical show were next on the itinerary of the rally, labeled an “open meeting.”

According to Essebsi, the ruling Troika (Ennahdha, Congress for the Republic, and Ettakatol) violated their coalition agreement, signed prior to the elections results, that stated that the next elections would take place one year after the constitutional elections of October 2011.

Thousands of Nidaa Tounes supporters attended the rally.

Clark Kampfe/Tunisia Live

“Essebsi issued a statement last January in order to warn of potential problems the Troika coalition was to face... And he was

right,” said Secretary General of Nidaa Tounes Taieb Baccouche.

Lazhaar Karoui, a member of the executive bureau of Nidaa Tounes, condemned a recent draft law presented by a group of National Constituent Assembly members, that aims to bar former regime supporters from participating in politics.

“Such a law, that prevents certain Tunisians from being nominated or elected, is a violation to individual freedoms and a violation to Tunisians, as they’re the only ones with the right to eliminate politicians by not voting for them,” he said. The draft law will further divide the nation, he said.

Essebsi called for dissolving of the League for the Protection of the Revolution, an official association that was formed under the first transitional government and that has been center of controversy over violence accusations against opposition parties, and condemned the recent violence against mausoleums. He accused the current government of lack of political will to hold the next elections and he

called for greater unity among parties within the opposition.

He also made a plea for national unity, describing the ongoing religious tension as unnecessary and threatening to cooperation.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/01/27/opposition-rally-draws-thousands/>

- **Tunisian Civil Society Lambasts Police Reform Process**

Representatives of Tunisia’s civil society say the process to reform Tunisia’s security apparatus two years since the popular uprising has suffered from slow progress and a lack of transparency.

“It’s a good thing that civil society is keeping an eye on police reform as it was not possible before. However, our participation has been limited to conferences and seminars since the official authorities are not communicating with us,” said Abdessatar Moussa, president of the Tunisian League of Human Rights.

Moussa was a panelist at an ongoing seminar on the challenges of reforming the post-revolution security apparatus. The seminar, held in Tunis by the Tunisian association “Reform,” started today, January 25, and continues tomorrow.

Human rights activists, media figures, various civil society representatives, and a handful of politicians convened for the conference. Panelists and attendees addressed the lack of communication between police officers, police unions, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, and private citizens.

“There is a big gap, and there is no communication between the Ministry of Interior and the security unions, which will result in negative repercussions on the state of security,” said Lotfi Azzouz, president of Amnesty International’s bureau in Tunisia.

Participants also criticized work conditions for policemen, citing them among the reasons for corruption and police violence. Panelists agreed that torture persists in police stations, detention centers, and prisons.

“In post-revolution Tunisia, citizens are still treated badly by policemen in the streets... It is terrifying,” Moussa said.

Former Deputy Minister of the Interior Lazhar Akremi said dialogue is a crucial step in the reform process.

(L) Lazhar Akremi, Said Mechichi and Abdessatar Moussa (R)

“Dialogue not as in round tables [...] No. This dialogue must be based on transparency, internal dialogue, which consists of the relationship between policemen and their unions, and external dialogue, which consists of the relationship between policemen and the civil society,” he added.

In contrast to the significant presence of activists, the only government representative to attend the conference was Deputy Minister of the Interior Said Mechichi. He responded to the general criticisms, saying that Ali Laarayedh, minister of the interior, has been the most questioned minister in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA).

“We’re constantly under the pressure of both civil society and the media [...] We are dealing with many hardships but doing our best,” he said.

Providing better equipment to security forces and raising awareness among personnel about human rights are among the reform steps that the Ministry of the Interior has taken thus far, he argued.

Some, though, were unsatisfied with Mechichi’s responses and pointed to a lack of political will to reform.

“There are no collective intentions to put words into actions. We, in the NCA, expect more involvement in the reform process,” said Nadiaa Chaabane, a representative of the opposition bloc at the NCA.

The audience was dynamic and interactive. Among the attendees stood 22-year-old Wael Guerafi, who lost a leg during the protests.

“I lost my leg because of police violence against protesters during the uprisings [...] Changing outfits and uniforms does not matter; attitudes and behavior must be changed,” he said. “The Ministry of the

Interior is still protecting the criminal, who did this to me and many others.”

International panelists during the second session of the seminar.

A second session of the seminar addressed solutions and proposals to improve the reform process. International panelists from Georgia, Germany, and the U.S. shared with the audience their own expertise and their countries’ experiences in police reform.

“The government might think it’s not fair to expect results in such a short period. But they shouldn’t disappoint people either,” said Eka Zgouladze, Georgian minister of the interior in charge of police reform.

She said that in Georgia both drastic and mundane measures were taken to reform the country’s security apparatus. Even though extreme steps had to be taken, such as firing without prior notice 20,000 policemen from the traffic police department, a simple message like “the police are here to serve people” should be advertised in order to gain people’s trust, she said.

“A government shouldn’t turn to another one about reform. The answers are in your room. Here,” Stone said.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/01/25/tunisian-civil-society-lambastes-police-reform-process/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Berri: Elections will not be held under 1960 law**

Lebanese Speaker Nabih Berri said the upcoming parliamentary elections will not be held under the 1960 electoral law.

“Those who think that it is possible to hold the elections under the 1960 law in case [we] failed to reach an agreement on a new one are unaware of the legal and constitutional facts pertaining to this issue,” Berri told As-Safir newspaper in remarks published Monday.

“Article 11 of the 1960 law states the necessity to form an independent committee to supervise the elections under a decision made by the cabinet... but the cabinet will not form this

committee as long as most of the ministers are against the 1960 law.”

Berri also said that he called for a meeting for the joint parliamentary committees as a result of the failure of the electoral sub-committee to reach an agreement over an electoral law.

“The call for a joint committees’ meeting is a natural and axiomatic step [aiming to] continue discussions on the electoral law, especially after what happened in the last meeting of the sub-committee,” he said.

“What was I supposed to do? Am I asked to stand and watch while time is running out?”

Last week, the parliamentary sub-committee tasked with reviewing electoral laws for Lebanon’s upcoming parliamentary election wrapped up the “first phase” of its hearing sessions.

However, members of the sub-committee accused their political rivals of obstructing progress. These allegations are made amid a huge rift between supporters and opponents of the Orthodox Gathering’s

proposal, which calls for citizens to vote for candidates of their own religious sect.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/berri_elections_will_not_be_held_under_1960_law

- **Future bloc to boycott parliamentary committee meetings, MP says**

The Future bloc will not attend the meeting of the joint parliamentary committees, in accordance with its decision to boycott all sessions attended by ministers of Prime Minister Najib Miqati's cabinet, Future bloc MP Jamal al-Jarrah said on Monday.

"There might be a symbolic participation for the Future Movement's allies in the joint committees' meetings, but the Future Movement will not participate," Jarrah told Free Lebanon radio.

The opposition MP also said that his bloc was preparing a draft law similar to that based on 50 small electoral constituencies, which was submitted by the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb party.

The Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party and independent March 14

Christian figures have publicly rejected the Orthodox Gathering's proposal, which calls citizens to vote for candidates of their own religious sect. Lebanon's four main Christian parties have expressed support for the draft law.

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in 2013, but the country's political players remain divided over the electoral law issue.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/future_bloc_not_to_attend_parliamentary_joint_committees_meetings_mp_says

- **FPM committed to alliance with Hezbollah, MP says**

Lebanon's Change and Reform bloc MP Ziad Aswad said his party, the Free Patriotic Movement, was committed to its alliance with Hezbollah, the National News Agency reported.

"Our alliance [with Hezbollah] is consistent and will continue with the support of the trifecta of 'the people, the army and the Resistance,' and the Resistance being above everything else because it has proven that it [does not

defect from the country],” Aswad said on Sunday.

Aswad called on “all the ones who doubt the FPM-Hezbollah alliance to realize that it is no longer a matter of interest, it has become deeper and our strategic orientations have been proven right.”

“All the sectarian incitement and promotion of strife that we are witnessing are the makings of the ones who have been conspiring against Lebanon since 2006,” he said in reference to the opposition March 14 coalition.

The Lebanese political scene is split between pro-Syrian regime parties affiliated with the March 8 alliance and Western-backed forces associated with the March 14 coalition.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/fpm_consistent_in_alliance_with_hezbollah_mp_says

6. SYRIA

- **Syrians come up with new ways to live with war**

Syria's 22-month war, despite its dehumanizing effects, is teaching ordinary people to pull together and come up with innovative ways to survive without electricity or their daily bread.

"Buying bread or stepping out to collect water can be deadly," said Abu Hisham, a young resident of Aleppo, the strife-torn country's main northern city and one-time economic capital.

"People used to panic [last summer] when warplanes started to bomb Aleppo, but now they're so used to it that almost nobody reacts," he told AFP via Skype.

A student in Damascus before the conflict against President Bashar al-Assad's regime erupted in March 2011, Abu Hisham fled to his hometown when he found out he was wanted by the intelligence services.

Abu Hisham became a citizen journalist, filming and uploading on the Internet from the city which has been devastated by six months of guerrilla warfare between rebel fighters and government forces.

"Before, during power cuts, everything would come to a halt. Now we celebrate if we have electricity even for just two hours," he said, as residents come up with new ways to cope.

"The winter's cold and there's no fuel. Families have to chop up their furniture for firewood," Abu Hisham said.

The family of Umm Alaa, who is raising seven children in Aleppo, is among those suffering the most.

"Before, I could buy large quantities of food to last us for months, but now with no electricity, our fridge is of no use," she said.

Umm Rami's life is also hard, having had to survive with no electricity for the past six weeks. "I can't use the iron or the fridge and I can't use the television to see what's happening," said the 50-year-old mother.

In Daraya, a suburb of Damascus, Abu Kinan said solidarity was the key to survival for those left behind in a district which used to be home to 200,000 before the conflict broke out.

Abu Kinan's only dream used to be to find love and get married. But the war crushed such hopes.

"I only sleep when I'm really exhausted, and sometimes the explosions wake me up. I don't feel like a human being anymore," he said, also via the Internet.

Everyday survival has become a team effort, such as taking turns to do the communal laundry. "This crisis has taught us young people to do things for ourselves," he said.

One friend has become an expert cook in Daraya, coming up with hearty dishes from the scant resources available, mainly dry, canned food in the absence of fresh meat.

Abu Kinan said people "joke all the time" about the harsh realities of a war which the United Nations says has killed more than 60,000 people.

"It's a way to cope" with everyday life, he said. "But one day, when we have time in take in all that we've seen and had to endure, we will cry rivers of tears."

Several members of his family joined the hundreds of thousands who have fled Syria to escape the daily bloodshed, although his father has also opted to stay put in Daraya.

When he can't provide for his father, the neighbors chip in. "It's an extraordinary feeling, violence has brought people together," he said.

The hardships are even worse in the central city of Homs where more than six months of siege by the regime have turned entire neighborhoods into open prisons for hundreds of people, including women and children.

"There are daily fights even for cigarettes," said Abu Bilal, a rebel fighter in its flashpoint Old City. "Normally the fights stop when a commander arrives and distributes cigarettes. But we're under siege, so of course people are tense."

Despite the inhuman conditions, Abu Bilal can enjoy at least a semblance of normal life from time to time.

"I have friends here and we have had some good times. A few weeks ago, we managed to get our hands on a hookah [water pipe]. We had a long evening together and shared a good laugh."

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyria/syrians_come_up_with_new_ways_to_live_with_war

- **Syria pledges to end opposition prosecutions**

Syria's high judicial council has announced a suspension of prosecutions of opposition members so they can join a national dialogue, state media reported Sunday, without detailing the nature of crimes affected by the ruling.

The report comes after Interior Minister Mohammed al-Shaar had earlier vowed to ease the return of Syrian opposition members living in exile so that they too can take part in the dialogue proposed by President Bashar al-Assad on January 6.

"The high judicial council has decided to discontinue all prosecutions against opposition forces and individuals so they may participate in the national dialogue"

the official news agency SANA said, without elaborating.

The council stressed that those "opposition forces will be designated by the government or first ministerial action group charged with implementing the preparatory phase of the program to resolve the Syrian crisis."

In his January 6 speech, Assad proposed a dialogue with opposition figures who were not "slaves of the West" and on condition that "terrorist attacks" came to a halt before any political transition.

The regime has branded activists and armed insurgents alike as terrorists.

Shaar, in comments reported by state media on Saturday, said the directive allowing Syrians living abroad to return was not a blanket amnesty.

"Executive orders will be issued to border crossings to facilitate and guarantee that all political opposition forces may enter the country, maintain residency and leave at will," Shaar was quoted as saying.

"There is a big difference between those who safeguard their nation and those who are complicit in foreign agendas."

The United Nations says that more than 60,000 people have been killed in Syria's uprising, which broke out in March 2011 with peaceful protests and morphed into an armed insurgency after a harsh regime crackdown.

There is a big difference between those who safeguard their nation and those who are complicit in foreign agendas.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/syria_pledges_to_end_opposition_prosecutions

- **Assad made “grave error” over reforms, Medvedev says**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made a "grave, perhaps fatal error" by delaying political reforms, Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev said Sunday.

"He should have acted much more quickly and reached out to the peaceful opposition which was ready to sit at the negotiating table with him," Russian news agencies quoted Medvedev as saying.

"It's a grave error on his part, perhaps fatal," he said, in a rare criticism of Assad by Syria's traditional ally Moscow.

"It seems to me that his chances of staying [in power] are shrinking day by day," Medvedev said in remarks to CNN television on the sidelines of the Davos World Economic Forum in Switzerland.

He reiterated Russia's position that only the Syrian people can decide the fate of Assad, whose departure the West has long called for in the face of the near two-year long conflict in Syria.

"I repeat once again: It is for the Syrian people to decide. Not Russia or the United States or any other country."

Moscow has long opposed any foreign intervention in the conflict that the United Nations says has killed at least 60,000 people since March 2011.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/syrias_assad_has_committed_grave_perhaps_fatal_error_russia_pm_says

- **Syria vows to ease return of opposition**

Executive orders will be issued to facilitate entry of Syrian opposition members as President Bashar al-Assad proposes national dialogue with all forces who are not 'slaves of the West'

Syria's interior minister has vowed to ease the return of opposition members to the war-torn country for a dialogue with the regime, state news agency SANA reported.

"Executive orders will be issued to border crossings to facilitate and guarantee that all political opposition forces may enter the country, maintain residency and leave at will," Syria's interior minister Mohammed al-Shaar was quoted as saying on Saturday.

SANA said the directives, outlined at a meeting between Shaar and high-ranking ministry officials, aimed to ease the participation of opposition members in a national dialogue called by President Bashar al-Assad on 6 January.

In a rare speech, Assad proposed a dialogue with opposition figures who were not "slaves of the West" and on condition

that "terrorist attacks" came to a halt before any political transition.

The regime has branded activists and armed insurgents alike as terrorists.

Shaar pointed out that the new directive was not a blanket amnesty. "There is a big difference between those who safeguard their nation and those who are complicit in foreign agendas," he said.

The United Nations says that more than 60,000 people have been killed in Syria's uprising, which broke out in March 2011 with peaceful protests and morphed into an armed insurgency after a harsh regime crackdown.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63420/World/Region/Syria-vows-to-ease-return-of-opposition.aspx>

- **Elite troops shell Damascus suburb: Activists**

Syria's elite Republican Guard troops shell the city of Daraya with heavy artillery and tanks, activists say

Elite Syrian regime forces stationed at Mazzeh military airbase shelled the

embattled town of Daraya just southwest of Damascus on Sunday, opposition activists and a watchdog reported.

"Heavy artillery and tank shelling hit Daraya from Mazzeh military airport and the Fourth Division headquarters on Moadamiyet mountain as fierce explosions shook the town," the Syrian Revolution General Council said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported the bombardment.

Daraya has been the scene of a fierce regime onslaught with tank fire and air raids for more than two months as troops loyal to President Bashar al-Assad seek to retake the beleaguered rebel bastion.

State news agency SANA reported late on Saturday that "our valiant army continued to pursue armed terrorist groups who had carried out killings and theft and targeted the infrastructure of Daraya."

An anti-regime activist living in the town told AFP that 90 percent of the residents had fled in late November amid escalating attacks and the arrival of elite Republican Guard troops.

Overnight, the Britain-based Observatory said nine people were wounded in a car bombing in Jaramana, a majority Christian and Druze district southeast of Damascus where more than 50 people were killed in car bombings last November.

The watchdog also reported fierce clashes between troops and rebels near an air force administration building in the nearby town of Maliha on Sunday.

For months, rebels and troops have battled where insurgents have set up rear bases outside the capital.

The Assad regime has regularly claimed to be launching its final crackdown on the insurgency in Damascus province.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63389/World/Region/Elite-troops-shell-Damascus-suburb-Activists.aspx>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **UAE to try 94 Islamists over plot to seize power**

The UAE attorney general says the suspected Islamists communicated with the international Muslim Brotherhood organisation for help and financial support to serve their undeclared goal of seizing power

The United Arab Emirates has ordered 94 citizens to be tried on charges of seeking to seize power in the U.S.-allied Gulf Arab country, the attorney general said in a statement on Sunday.

State news agency WAM quoted the attorney general, Salem Saeed Kubaish, as saying the suspects had publicly called for adherence to the Islamic religion when in fact they were secretly plotting to take over the oil-producing country.



"Their unannounced aims were to seize power and confronting the main principles which the rule is based on," the statement said. "They had plotted for that discreetly

at secret meetings they held in their homes, farms and other places where they tried to conceal and hide what they were plotting from the concerned authorities."

The UAE last year rounded up about 60 people, many members of al-Islah, an Islamist group suspected of links to the Muslim Brotherhood which is banned in the country, according to a privately owned newspaper.

Al-Khaleej newspaper said in September the detained Islamists had confessed to setting up a secret organisation with an armed wing with the aim of seizing power and establishing an Islamist state in the UAE.

Kubaish said the suspects used social media and the Internet with the aim of creating a public opinion hostile to the UAE government and its leadership.

"They also communicated with the international Muslim Brotherhood organisation and other similar organisations outside the country, asked them for help, expertise and financial support to serve their undeclared goal of seizing power," the statement said.

Al-Islah says its mission was to advocate peaceful reform and it has no connections with the global Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928. The group has risen to elected power in Egypt after the 2011 uprising that forced out Hosni Mubarak.

The UAE, a major oil exporter and Middle East business hub, tolerates no organised political opposition.

Concerned about possible spillover from the Arab Spring, it has acted to isolate dissidents, stripping seven Islamists of their citizenship last year on national security grounds.

Islamist demands include more civil rights and greater power for the Federal National Council, a quasi-parliamentary body that advises the government but has no legislative power. It is appointed by the UAE's Sunni Muslim rulers.

The attorney general said members of the group had sought to penetrate institutions of the state, including schools, universities and ministries. Members of the group had invested revenues from dues and charity

funds they had obtained to set up commercial enterprises and real estate investments held in their own names to conceal their activities from the state.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63459/World/Region/UAE-to-try---Islamists-over-plot-to-seize-power.aspx>

- **UN backs Yemen transition, thousands protest Saleh immunity**

Thousands of Yemeni protesters take the streets to demand international probe into violations committed by Saleh's ousted regime amid the visit of a UN Security Council team to the country

A Security Council team pledged support for Yemen's political transition in a rare visit to Sanaa Sunday that drew thousands to the streets to demand the scrapping of immunity for ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh under a UN-backed deal.

The brief visit by a delegation of representatives from the council's 15 members is to "support the political transition" led by President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, British representative Mark Lyall Grant told reporters in the capital.

"We believe that President Hadi's leadership has been instrumental in driving forward the reforms necessary to make Yemen a more stable and prosperous country," said Lyall Grant.

The team, which includes the head and members of the top UN body, held talks with Hadi and government ministers, state television said.

UN special envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, said at a ceremony after the talks that the visit was "historic and unprecedented in the region" and was "to stress the importance of pressing ahead with the political process."

Another member of the team, Morocco's Security Council representative Mohammed Loulichki, too said that trip was unprecedented in the region and "stresses the great interest of the international community in the situation in Yemen".

With the UN officials in the capital, demonstrators in their thousands took to the streets to demand Saleh be put brought before the courts.

"The people want to put the killer on trial," chanted the demonstrators, referring to Saleh who was eased out of office in February 2012 after three decades of rule following the UN-backed and Gulf-brokered deal.



Demonstrators also called for a "return of funds stolen by the former president and his family."

The Youth of the Revolution, a group that was the main engine of the year-long protests that finally led to Saleh's ouster, also called for an international probe into violations and crimes committed by his regime.

It urged the UN Security Council to "freeze the funds owned by the leaders of the former regime and return them to public treasury".

Saleh was ousted under a deal which also stipulated restructuring the army and integrating military and security forces under a single command, a task that remains difficult with Saleh's sons and relatives still occupying senior security posts.

The delegation's visit comes as Sanaa struggles to organise a national dialogue conference that would result in a new constitution and presidential and parliamentary elections in February 2014, thereby ending the current two-year transition period planned as per the Gulf initiative.

The conference, originally set for mid-November, has been repeatedly delayed as some factions of the Southern Movement, which has campaigned for autonomy or secession for the formerly independent south, have refused to join the talks.

UN envoy Benomar said that convening the dialogue "is close" but he did not elaborate.

He told Yemen's state television that the "process is difficult," and urged all Yemeni parties to "realise that there is a historic opportunity and join the national dialogue

without preconditions to solve all Yemeni issues, including the question of the south".

"We have asked the Security Council to continue its support to Yemen and face the parties impeding the national dialogue," Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi told AFP, adding that the talks are expected to begin in February..

After North and South Yemen unified, in 1994, a short-lived secession bid was crushed by Sanaa troops and since then the citizens of the south have complained of discrimination.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63446/World/Region/UN-backs-Yemen-transition,-thousands-protest-Saleh.aspx>

- **Qatar to deliver verdict in poet's trial Feb 25: lawyer**

Qatari poet Mohamed Al-Ajami is accused of incitement against the regime through his writings

A Qatari appeals court will deliver on February 25 the verdict in the trial of a poet jailed for life after he was accused of

incitement against the regime through his writings, his lawyer said.

Lawyer Mohamed Nejib al-Naimi told AFP that during Sunday's hearing the prosecution insisted on upholding the life sentence against poet Mohamed al-Ajami.

"The verdict against the poet Mohamed al-Ajami will be announced on February 25," Naimi said.

Naimi said that at Sunday's court session he insisted "there was no evidence Ajami had recited the poem he is being tried for in public" and that he only read it "at his apartment in Cairo."

Ajami was arrested after the publication of his "Jasmine poem" which criticised governments across the Gulf region with its line that "we are all Tunisia in the face of the repressive elite," according to media reports.

The poem referred to the north African country that saw the first of the Arab Spring uprisings.

Amnesty International has said that Ajami, arrested in November 2011, is accused of

incitement "to overthrow the ruling system" and "insulting the emir" Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Naimi, a former Qatari justice minister, said that according to charges against his client he was liable for a maximum of five years in jail.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63431/World/Region/Qatar-to-deliver-verdict-in-poets-trial-Feb--lawye.aspx>

Officials said the blast hit the vehicle after three men were detained by the police on suspicion of planting a separate bomb in Kandahar.

Officials said Taliban militants are suspected of setting the roadside bomb.

Earlier January 26, 10 Afghan police were killed by a suicide bomber in an attack in the northern city of Kunduz.

Based on reporting from AFP and AP

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

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Police Killed In Afghan Bomb

January 27, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Officials in Afghanistan say at least 10 people -- including eight police officers -- were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb.

At least two men who had been detained by the police were also killed in the explosion late January 26 in the southern city of Kandahar.

• Three Afghan brothers killed in US-led night raid

Press TV

January 27, 2013

Three Afghan brothers have been killed in a night raid carried out by the US-led foreign troops in eastern Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

An Afghan governor confirmed the operation and said the three brothers had been in a taxi when foreign forces opened fire on them in Logar Province late Saturday.

Afghan authorities have launched an investigation into the deadly incident.

The latest incident of violence in Afghanistan came three days after US-led troops carried out a similar night-raid operation in the eastern province of Kapisa. Three Afghan women were killed.

Over the past few months, night raids by the US-led forces have resulted in civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The raids have increased tension between Washington and Kabul.

Afghans have expressed outrage at the attacks by holding demonstrations throughout the country.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of war on terror. The invasion removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains across the country.

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

- **Main opposition leaders discuss Afghan presidential election**

By Sajad

Khaama Press

January 27, 2013

Senior members of the National Front — the main political opposition coalition of the Afghan government following a joint press conference with the provincial governor for northern Balkh province of Afghanistan Ata Mohammad Noor announced to support a specified candidate introduced by the coalition for the upcoming presidential election.

The National Front of Afghanistan following a statement also expressed their concerns regarding a free and fair presidential election.

The press conference was attended by head of the National Front Ahmad Zia Massound, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq and former Afghan spy chief Amrullah Saleh besides Balkh governor Ata Mohammad Noor.

Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq head of the Hezb-e-Wahdat Millie Afghanistan and a member of the National Coalition said they are concerned regarding the presidential election due to be organized in 2014.

He said the main reason behind their gathering was to convey their message to Afghan people that the National Front of Afghanistan will remain and move united towards the upcoming presidential election.

Mohaqiq said, “We call on the Afghan people not waste their votes, they should vote for a specified candidate and we will hopefully announce him in the near future.”

In the meantime Balkh governor Ata Mohammad Noor said he will participate in 2014 presidential election only if his conditions are met.

Ata Mohammad Noor said this should be shared and consulted with Abdullah Abdullah head of the national coalition, Mohammad Qasim Fahim deputy president and the leadership of Jamiat party.

He also said to consider participating in upcoming presidential election and announced that he had meetings with Zalmi Khalilzad regarding his unity for the

presidential election however he said that they could not reach to an agreement.

Ata Mohammad Noor is serving as Balkh governor since 2004 and is considered to be one of the most powerful provincial governor in Afghanistan.

Despite almost a year is left for the presidential election in Afghanistan however coalition parties and other political parties have started their activities and a similar session was organized in capital Kabul on Saturday by other coalitions and political parties to express their concerns regarding a fair and free election in 2014,

According to political observers the National Front of Afghanistan will become a key player in 2014 presidential election if other political parties and coalitions agree to join them.

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

- **Hekmatyar: Judicial Immunity to US Soldiers Prolongs War in Afghanistan**

Fars News Agency

January 27, 2013

TEHRAN (FNA)- Leader of Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Gulbadin Hekmatyar described complete withdrawal of the foreign forces as his party's precondition for attending the next presidential election, and said if Kabul gives judicial immunity to the US forces, war will continue in Afghanistan.

"If the foreign military forces withdraw from Afghanistan and a transparent and fair election is held, the Hezb-i-Islami will participate in the upcoming presidential election," Hekmatyar said in an interview with Kabulnews private tv channel on Sunday.

He, meantime, said that if Kabul and Washington sign a security pact which gives judicial immunity to the US forces in Afghanistan, his party will be left with no other way but continued resistance and war.

The US-led war in Afghanistan began in October 2001. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across the country, despite the presence of thousands of US-led troops.

Iranian officials have frequently lashed out at the US and NATO forces for occupation of Afghanistan for more than a decade under the pretext of war on terror.

Tehran stresses that the responsibility for the establishment of security and stability in Afghanistan should be in hands of the country's government and security forces, but not foreigners.

Afghanistan has long been a focus of imperial rivalry and scene of foreign intervention, most recently since the 2001 US-led invasion but also in the 1980s uprising against Russian troops that ultimately helped bring down the Soviet Union.

Washington denies it is seeking to establish permanent military bases in Afghanistan, but American military sources say they envisage around 15,000 forces remaining in Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal.

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

- **Iranian Energy Minister Conveys Ahmadinejad's Message to Karzai**

Fars News Agency

January 27, 2013

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Energy Minister Majid Namjou, who is on an official visit to Kabul, submitted a message from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai.

In his message, President Ahmadinejad has underlined the necessity for Iranian companies' more active participation and partnership in Afghanistan's water and power sectors, and called on Kabul officials to pave the way for these companies' increased presence and operation in Afghanistan.

In his meeting with President Karzai on Sunday, Namjou also discussed mutual cooperation in different economic fields, including water and electricity.

The Iranian energy minister arrived in Afghanistan today to discuss further expansion of ties and energy cooperation between the two nations.

During his stay in Afghanistan, Namjou also attended the inaugural ceremony of two Iranian-made electric turbines today.

Two diesel turbines with the power generation capacities of 25 megawatts became operational on Sunday. Afghanistan's Energy and Water Minister Ismail Khan was also present at the inaugural ceremony of the Iranian-made electric turbines.

Namjou described his meeting with Afghan Energy and Water Minister Ismail Khan as positive and constructive.

Iran has helped Afghanistan in upgrading g its electricity system and half of Herat city's electricity needs are supplied by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran is one of the most important donors to Afghanistan which has kept its promises to help to the reconstruction of the war-hit country.

Iran has built some roads, power transmission lines, and border stations, among the other infrastructure projects which would better link the two nations.

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O. 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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