



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **Kobler expresses concern [that] Falluja's events [might] be repeated in Niniveh, calls on the Government [to exercise] restraint (NINA)**

29 Jan 2013

Mosul (NINA) - The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Martin Kobler, expressed concern from having last Friday's events of Falluja, in which tens of demonstrators killed and wounded, being repeated in Niniveh province.

After his meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 29, with the Governor of Niniveh, Atheel al-Nijaifi, and representatives for the protestors, Kobler said that his visit to Mosul that comes in a crucial time, is to meet with the Governor as well as with representatives for the demonstrators and clergymen.

He added, "We fear that events of Falluja be repeated in Niniveh, we support peaceful demonstrations because they represent a large part of the country's democracy."

Kobler added that his mission is basically based on not to resort to violence; peaceful demonstration and for the Government for high degree of restraint, in addition to respect to human rights.

He stressed that the UN's role is to remain neutral when it comes to politics, but when it comes to the principles of the UN and the human rights, the UN is not neutral.

Kobler went on saying, "It is extremely important that the peoples' demands be taken seriously and must be responded or dealt with in accordance with the Constitution and through constructive discussion."

He called on all sides to sit together and hold constructive and positive discussion to find solutions to the problems.

- **UN can't take stand on Iraqi demonstrations, Kobler (Aswat al-Iraq)**

29 Jan 2013

NINEWA/ Aswat al-Iraq: UN representative to Iraq Martin Kobler announced, in a press conference, today that the United Nations cannot take a

stand regarding the demonstrations taking place in Iraq.

He stressed that the UN role is "just listening to all sides".

Kobler added that the role of the UN is "neutral in political crises", pointing that "the demands of the demonstrators should be taken seriously and the Iraqi government should deal with these demands according to the constitution".

Kobler arrived here today to meet and listen to the demands of the protestors.

He called the Iraqi government for "self-control and not repeating Fallujah incident".

On the other hand, Ninewa governor stated in the conference that "the UN is not part in the current events, but its role is connected with human rights issues.

It is the 34th day for the protests in Ninewa province.

- **[Number of] Syrian refugees abroad reaches 700.000, UN (Aswat al-Iraq)**

29 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: The United Nations said today that 700.000 Syrian refugees are living in the neighboring countries, including 77.000 in Iraq.

The UN sources said that Lebanon is hosting 157139 refugees in addition to 69.000 waiting for their registration.

Jordan hosted 167444 registered refugees, while 51729 are waiting to be enlisted.

Turkey has 163161 refugees living in 15 camps, while Iraq is having 77415.

In addition, Egypt got 14312 refugees in addition to 5471 in other North African counties, as the sources added.

- **Maliki: The Government adopted practical measures to implement the demonstrators' legitimate demands (NINA)**

29 Jan 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said that the Government has adopted practical measures to implement legitimate demands of the demonstrators, and that the specialized committee will

continue their works to achieve these demands.

A statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office, on Tuesday, Jan. 29, said that in his meeting with Tribal Initiative Committee, formed by Iraqi tribes in a number of provinces quoted Maliki welcoming the forming of the Committee, stressing the necessity to joint efforts to preserve Iraq's unity, security and stability.

For their part, tribal chiefs asserted that they have formed their committee in response to calls from citizens and clergymen in an attempt to defuse the commotion that Iraq's enemies are trying to ignite it and to follow up with the demonstrators' legitimate demands.

In a press conference after the meeting, spokesman for the Committee said that they have discussed with the Prime Minister the issues that would led to implement the demonstrators' legitimate demands; who in turn responded to all legitimate demands in accordance with the Constitution.

- **Close source to Maliki: Anbar tribes complain about the spread of the**

gunmen and ask us to return the army (Shafaq News)

29 Jan 2013

Shafaq News / A deputy of the state of law coalition revealed on Tuesday, that Anbar tribes have demanded the return of the army deployment in Fallujah district, because of the return of the armed groups.

Salman al-Moussawi said for "Shafaq News", that "Anbar tribes had told representatives of the government the need to return the deployment of the Iraqi army in Fallujah district to control the security."

Al-Moussawi who is a close source to Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki added that "tribes also complained from the deployment of the armed groups in Fallujah and surrounding areas," referring to "the video tape that showed masked gunmen in Anbar".

He stressed that "the leaders of the army made their decision to withdraw army troops from there and will not retreat from their decision."

The military authorities in Baghdad decided to withdraw military units from Fallujah to be replaced by federal police, following clashes witnessed by the district last Friday between the army and protesters.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4962-close-source-to-maliki-anbar-tribes-complain-about-the-spread-of-the-gunmen-and-ask-us-to-return-the-army.html>

- **Al-Iraqiya holds Washington [responsible for] clashes between the Iraqi army and Fallujah's protesters (Shafaq News)**

29 Jan 2013

Shafaq News / Al-Iraqiya list demanded on Tuesday, the military authorities to arrest members of the army who fired bullets against demonstrators in Fallujah, holding the United States the responsibility for this incident which caused the death of some protesters and injured others.

The head of the bloc in the parliament, Salman al-Jumaili said at a news conference in the parliament attended by "Shafaq News", that "Anbar Operations Command has confirmed explicitly that

the army had opened fire on demonstrators without the issuance of orders from the top leadership."

He added that "Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and Defense Minister are required to detain or arrest the force that was close to the demonstrations, which opened fire until completing the investigation in this incident."

Jumaili hold the U.S. government also for what the demonstrators have suffered from in Fallujah as the weapon that was used according to his confirmation was from U.S., "noting that" when the United States sells arms , it must require not to use it against the demonstrators or the neighboring countries. "

The MP form state law of coalition, Salman al-Moussawi revealed earlier to "Shafaq News", that "Anbar tribes have demanded the return of the army deployment in Fallujah district because of the return of the armed groups.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4964-al-iraqiya-holds-washington-the-responsibility-of-clashes-between-the-iraqi-army-and-fallujahs-protesters-.html>

- **Iraq ups anti-Qaeda militia pay to appease demos (AFP)**

29 January 2013

AFP - Iraqi officials said Tuesday they would up the salaries of Sunni militiamen who fought Al-Qaeda during the country's brutal sectarian war, the latest bid to appease mostly-Sunni anti-government rallies.

The immediate two-thirds increase in wages for the Sahwa, otherwise known as the Sons of Iraq or the Awakening, comes as officials have trumpeted a substantial prisoner release in the face of more than a month of demonstrations in the country's north and west.

Around 41,000 Sahwa fighters are to receive 500,000 Iraqi dinars (\$415) a month, up from 300,000 dinars (\$250), Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani told a news conference on Tuesday.

The Sahwa is composed of bands of Sunni tribesmen who sided with the US military from late-2006 onwards against Al-Qaeda, a key factor helping turn the tide of Iraq's bloody insurgency.

Sunni militants still linked to Al-Qaeda regularly target Sahwa fighters in violent attacks because they regard them as traitors.

An increase in wages for the Sahwa, as well as their incorporation into the security forces and civil service, has long been a demand of Iraq's Sunni community, calls that have been amplified by the recent protests.

In addition to the salary increase, officials in Baghdad recently claimed to have released nearly 900 inmates from Iraqi prisons, but have not provided a breakdown on how many were being held without charge and how many were simply being released as their jail terms had ended.

Shahristani also publicly apologised in a news conference this month for holding detainees without charge.

The demonstrations come amid a political crisis in Iraq that has pitted Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki against many of his erstwhile government partners less than three months ahead of provincial elections.

<http://www.france24.com/en/20130129-iraq-ups-anti-qaeda-militia-pay-appease-demos>

- **Maliki includes all women detainees in private amnesty (alliraqnews)**

29 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, approved, on Tuesday including all the women prisoners, without condition, in the request of the private amnesty.

A statement by the Premier office received by AIN cited "Maliki received at his office in Baghdad the Tribal initiative commission which was formed from the Iraqi tribes in a number of Iraqi provinces."

The statement quoted Maliki as saying "The Government made several practical measures to meet the legitimate demands of the demonstrators,' confirming "The commissions concerned to follow up these demands will go on its work."

"For their part, the tribal leaders stressed that the formation of the tribal initiative commission was under request of the

citizens and the clergymen in an attempt to curb the sectarianism that Iraq's enemies want to ignite," the statement concluded.

- **Maliki ready to release female detainees and change laws, tribal committee (Aswat al-Iraq)**

29 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Premier Nouri al-Maliki stressed today that the Iraqi government took "practical arrangements to implement the legitimate demands of the demonstrators".

During his meeting with Tribal Initiative Committee, formed by Iraqi tribes from different provinces, Maliki, according to a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, confirmed necessity to preserve Iraqi unity.

The statement added that "it was agreed that the committee will supervise or coordinate with all other committees related to protestors' demands according to the constitution".

Premier Maliki promised to release all detained women with "a special pardon" through this committee.

The committee agreed with Premier Maliki to amend the laws connected with these demands, in addition to general amnesty law, as well as cancelling all arrest warrants due to the "secret informer".

- **Interior ministry demands [that] Bayan Jabr al-Zubaidi clarify the circumstances of [the] women detainee issue (Shafaq News)**

29 Jan 2013

Shafaq News / The Interior Ministry demanded on Tuesday, the head of Mwatn (citizen) bloc which represents the Islamic Supreme Council , Bayan Jabr al-Zubaidi to clarify the circumstances of the case of one of the prisons who was arrested six years ago.

The Interior Ministry said in a statement reported for "Shafaq News" that "it has inquired from the parliament, the Office of the MP, Bayan Jabr al-Zubaidi about the content of the statements of the MP that he has released to one of the satellite channels on the subject of a detained woman who was arrested six years ago by her husband's crime and was released a period ago."

The ministry said that "it has inquired about the name of the detainee and the place of the arrest in order to take the necessary legal procedures to be confirmed about this information."

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki demanded last week, al-Zubaidi to declare the name of the detainee who was arrested six years ago.

- **Mesari: Iraqiya's ministers handed their resignations to their bloc leaders in the slate (NINA)**

29 Jan 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from Iraqiya slate, Ahmed al-Mesari, said that Ministers from Iraqiya slate have handed their resignations to their bloc's leaders, within the slate, affirming that earlier, the ministers have expressed their readiness to abide by any decision made by Iraqiya and its leaders.

In a statement on Tuesday, Jan. 29, Mesari said that all of Iraqiya's ministers had earlier expressed their readiness to adopt any decision made by Iraqiya and its leaders, and that the ministers have submitted their resignations to the leaders

of their blocs, in a proof that they abide by any decision the slate make.

Mesari added that Iraqiya ministers already had decided to put attending the cabinet's meetings on hold, which is a political stand and showing solidarity with the demonstrators and protestors, as well as showing rejection to the government's policy in refusing to respond to the demonstrators' demands.

- **Iraqiya to discuss withdrawing from the political process (NINA)**

29 Jan 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Informed source said that the Iraqiya slate is to hold a meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 29, at the residence of Iraqi official, Usama al-Nijaif.

The source added that the meeting is to discuss the resignation of Iraqiya's ministers and lawmakers, as well as withdrawing from the political process.

- **White bloc: Qardhawi's visit to Iraq to consolidate sedition (alliraqnews)**

29 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The White bloc assured that the visit of Yousif al-Qardhawi, to Iraq will consolidate seditions.

The Secretary General of the White bloc, Jamal al-Batiekh, stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "Qardhawi's visit will support the process of dividing Iraq into three regions according to the sectarian affiliations."

"The seditions are led by some clergymen, chieftains and politicians who have good relations with the countries that aim at ruining Iraq," he stressed.

"All sides know Qardhawi and his participation in ruining many of other countries in addition to Iraq," he concluded.

- **Christian MP against annulling Iraqi antiterror law (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

29 Jan 2013

In a statement to the Iraqi Media Network's news centre, Luis Caro, MP for the Christian component, has said that his components rejects cancelling the anti-terrorism law and the Accountability and Justice Law that incriminate the Ba'thists whose hands were stained the Iraqi blood.

Caro explained that not all demands raised by demonstrators are legal and constitutional, calling for respecting some demonstrators' demands and fairly fulfilling them in the country."

- **EU: Early elections can't take place in Iraq (Shafaq News)**

29 Jan 2013

Shafaq News / The EU ambassadors in Iraq considered the problems that are taking place in Iraq as "a problem of the rule of law" and have nothing to do with security or economic conditions or religious movements and stressed the impossibility of having early legislative elections in Iraq in the presence of those problems.

The ambassador of the European Union in Iraq, Jana Habascova said in a statement reported for "Shafaq News" during her meeting with a delegation from the political body of the Sadrist movement led by the head of the parliamentary Ahrar bloc, Bahaa al-Araji "We Europeans are interested in the political crisis in Iraq."

She added that "we want to do everything that we can to speak with all representatives of political and religious

parties in order to offer a European example that had happened in the forties of the last century during the Second World War as we learned that parliamentary democracy is the only way for peaceful coexistence."

"There is a big problem in Anbar province and elsewhere in western Iraq, and we respect fundamental human right at any time and any place which is the right of demonstration."

Habascova pointed out that "we respect the support of the Sadrist movement to the demands of the demonstrators as not all demands are legal, expressing the support of the European Union for" the legal demands of the demonstrators. "

"We as representatives of twenty European countries believe that it is not possible to conduct a general election with the presence of this crisis", she added.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4961-eu-early-elections-cant-take-place-in-iraq-.html>

- **Jundyani: PUK, KDP approve to conduct elections in Kurdistan (alliraqnews)**

29 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The spokesperson of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's political office, Azad Jundyani, announced that "The PUK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party approved to conduct the elections in Kurdistan Region."

The PUK website reported Jundyani as saying "The proposal of forming mutual government in KR, which was suggested by the PUK and KDP during meeting the Kurdish opposition, has nothing to do with conducting the elections," pointing out "The PUK and the KDP support the elections."

The secretary general of the PUK, Barham Salih and Najervan Barzani, the deputy Secretary of the KDP have met with the opposition parties in KR where they agreed to launch dialogue among all the Kurdistan political sides.

BAGHDAD, Jan 29 (KUNA) -- The Iraqi government approved Tuesday a draft agreement with Kuwait to organize navigation in the Abdullah Waterway.

In a press statement, the Iraqi cabinet said it has endorsed and referred the agreement to the parliament for deliberations and approval.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2289778&language=en>

- **Iranian officials call for unity in Iraq (Tehran Times)**

TEHRAN – Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said that unity among Muslims is the best way to encounter enemies' plots.

In a meeting with Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Chairman Ammar Hakim in Tehran on Tuesday, Ahmadinejad said the current crises in the Middle East are not apart from the West's plots to save the Zionist regime of Israel for collapsing and gaining dominance over the region.

The president also emphasized the necessity of maintaining unity among all Iraqi tribes and factions and added that enemies are making efforts to fuel internal strife in order to implement their hegemonic plans.

Ahmadinejad noted that governments should be standard bearer in defending people's rights and not make any differences between ethnic or religious groups.

Tehran determined to expand ties with Iraq

In a separate meeting with Ammar Hakim, Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani commented on friendly and brotherly relations between the two countries of Iran and Iraq, saying, "The Islamic Republic of Iran seeks expanding the bilateral ties in all areas."

Commenting on enemies' plots to create divisions among the Iraqi people, Larijani added, "By avoiding conflicts, the vigilant and revolutionary people of Iraq will foil these plots."

Rafsanjani says Shia and Sunni Muslims should stay united

In his talks with Ammar Hakim on Monday, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani also insisted on the need to foster unity between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Iraq.

Rafsanjani highlighted the necessity of cooperation between all ethnic groups in Iraq to prevent foreigners to exploit the situation in the country.

Hakim said that the friendly country of Iran has always supported Iraq and expressed hope that the relations between the two Muslim countries would expand further.

<http://tehrantimes.com/politics/105236-iranian-officials-call-for-unity-in-iraq>

2. IRAN

• Iranian, Egyptian Officials Discuss Start of Direct Flights between Tehran, Cairo

TEHRAN (FNA)- Head of Iran's Interests Section in Cairo Mojtaba Amani and Egypt's Civil Aviation Minister Wael al-Maaddawi explored avenues for the further expansion of ties between the two Muslim countries specially in the field of aviation.

During the meeting held in Cairo on Monday, the two sides conferred on the establishment of direct flights between

the two countries, the Islamic republic news agency reported.

In August, the then Egypt's Civil Aviation Minister Samir Embaby had called for the start of direct flights between Tehran and Cairo due to the two nations' enthusiasm for making reciprocal visits.

"The measure is necessary due to the eagerness of many Egyptian and Iranian people to make reciprocal visits," Embaby was quoted by the Egyptian weekly, al-Youm al-Sabe' at the time.

He also underlined that starting direct flights between the two countries would play a vital role for trade and economic ties between Iran and Egypt, and said the economic studies carried out in Iran indicate that 60% of Iranians like to visit different Egyptian cities, partly for religious tourism.

After the collapse of Hosni Mubarak's regime, the Iranian and Egyptian officials voiced their interest in the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107139971>

- **Tehran Calls on West to Show Sincere Stance on Talks over N. Issue**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran called on the West, the US in particular, to adopt sincere approach in their talks with Tehran in a bid to find a solution to the current standoff between the two sides over the country's peaceful nuclear program.

Speaking on Tuesday, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said the standoff between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear energy program could be resolved if the G5+1 group (the US, Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany) acts sincerely toward Iran and innovatively.



Speaking to Al-Alam TV network, Larijani added Washington is making efforts to create obstacles to Iran-G5+1 talks in

order to prevent the negotiations from bearing fruit.

"Instead of undermining the Iran-G5+1 talks, the US should help the negotiations move forward," he noted.

He went on to say that the G5+1 group recently called for the postponement of nuclear talks with Iran to February because they were not ready to negotiate with the Islamic Republic in January.

In a telephone conversation with Undersecretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Baqeri on Friday, Deputy of EU Foreign Policy Chief Helga Schmid said that they are not ready to negotiate with Iran this month.

Schmid is the number two of EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who represents the G5+1 group in talks with Iran.

Iran's deputy chief negotiator, for his part, said that Iran is ready to attend the talks and asked the group to remain committed to the date agreed upon for talks in January.

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

Also this month, Iran's top negotiator in talks with the world powers Saeed Jalili had said Tehran and the Group 5+1 would resume talks later this month, although the place and date for the negotiations have not been finalized.

Jalili told reporters in New Delhi that Tehran has agreed to a new round of talks this month.

"We have accepted that these talks should be held in January ... but till now the details have not been finalized," he said.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide

power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107140092>

- **Iranian lawmaker slams French interference in Iran's internal affairs**



Every country has its own law that is respected in that country; therefore French officials do not have the right to intervene and be disrespectful.”

Iranian lawmaker Mansour Haqiqatpour
An Iranian lawmaker has condemned the recent remarks by French Foreign Ministry spokesman Philippe Lalliot as blatant interference in the internal affairs of the Islamic Republic.

Mansour Haqiqatpour, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Iran's Majlis, said on Monday, “Every country has its own law that is respected in that country; therefore French officials do not have the right to intervene and be disrespectful.”

Haqiqatpour also referred to the issue of human rights violations against Muslims in France and said if French authorities claimed to be supporters of freedom, they

should allow Muslims to disseminate their beliefs.

At several major French cities, airport security officials force Muslim women to remove their hijab in public in the name of “safety.”

Referring to the restrictions in the West, Haqiqatpour added, “Today, Western countries have confined and imprisoned their scientists because of their research on Holocaust.”

“The time has passed when they [Western countries] could present themselves as the cradle of freedom and use it as an excuse to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/30/286317/iran-mp-condemns-frances-interference/>

- **'Italy to be Iran's main EU trade partner in 2013'**

The President of Italy-Iran Chamber of Commerce and Industry has called for the expansion of economic relations between the two countries, saying that Rome will

be Tehran's main European trade partner for the year 2013.



During a meeting with a group of Iranian businessmen in Rome on Tuesday, Rosario Alessandro said Italy is prepared to increase the level of its business interactions with the Islamic Republic.

Sandro Pettinato, the deputy head of Italy-Iran Chamber of Commerce and Industry, also described Iran as a thriving and lucrative market for Italian industrialists.

In a meeting with Italian Ambassador to Iran Luca Giansanti on January 15, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran is a reliable trade partner for Italy and other European countries.

“Iran and Italy are two very important countries that have long-standing cultural relations and numerous commonalities,” Salehi said.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/30/286279/italy-to-be-irans-top-eu-trade-partner/>

- **US seeking to sabotage Iran-P5+1 talks, Iranian Parliament speaker says**

Iranian Majlis (Parliament) Speaker Ali Larijani says Washington is seeking to sabotage the talks between Iran and the P5+1 group when US officials should be making efforts to ensure the negotiations make progress.



In an exclusive interview with the Arabic-language news network Al-Alam on Tuesday, Larijani said the United States is making efforts to create obstacles for the talks between Iran and the P5+1 group (Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States, and Germany) in order to prevent the negotiations from bearing fruit.

“Instead of undermining the Iran-P5+1 talks, the US should help the negotiations move forward,” he stated.

He went on to say that the P5+1 group recently called for the postponement of nuclear talks with Iran to February because they were not ready to negotiate with the Islamic Republic in January.

This turn of events comes despite the fact that Iran was ready to attend the long-awaited negotiations and asked the P5+1 group to remain committed to the January date for the talks, which all sides had agreed upon, Larijani noted.

On January 25, European Union deputy foreign policy chief Helga Schmid asked for the adjournment of the next round of Iran-P5+1 talks to February.

Larijani also stated that the standoff between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear energy program could be resolved if the P5+1 group acts sincerely toward Iran and innovatively.

In addition, as a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and a signatory of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran will itself decide either to enrich uranium to 5 percent purity or 20 percent, he added.

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

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/30/286278/us-seeking-to-sabotage-iranp51-talks/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• Israel to give \$100 million in withheld

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- Israel will give President Mahmoud Abbas's administration around \$100 million in tax revenues that had been withheld in retaliation for his statehood bid in the United Nations, Israeli officials said on Wednesday.

They described the handover as a one-time deal, signalling rightist Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had not formally scrapped sanctions that have hurt the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank and worried world powers.

But the decision follows surprise setbacks for Netanyahu in a national election this month that, while giving him enough of a lead to head the next Israeli government, also set the stage for more moderate statecraft by boosting centrist challengers

whom he must now consider as coalition partners.

Under interim peace deals, Israel collects some \$100 million a month in duties on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, money Abbas badly needs to pay public sector salaries. It began withholding the funds as punishment for the UN's acceptance of Palestine as a non-member state in November.

Israel said the December levies would be used instead to start paying off \$200 million the Palestinians owe the Israel Electric Corporation, and predicted at the time that the lien on PA funds would be in force until March at least.



The PA's economic troubles were raised this week in a meeting between Netanyahu and Tony Blair, peace envoy for the United States, United Nations,

European Union and Russia, an Israeli official said.

Following those talks, the official told Reuters on condition of anonymity, "we have agreed to transfer one month's payment, because of the difficult financial situation there.

"This is a one-time decision and there is no decision yet on what will happen next."

Another Israeli official said the handover would take place imminently, "perhaps even today".

Israel has previously frozen payments to the PA during times of heightened security and diplomatic tensions, provoking strong international criticism, such as when the UN cultural body UNESCO granted the Palestinians full membership in 2011.

Abbas's UN victory was a diplomatic setback for the United States and Israel, which were joined by only seven other countries in voting against upgrading the Palestinians' observer status to "non-member state", like the Vatican, from "entity".

Hours after the UN vote, Israel said it would authorize 3,000 new settler homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and expedite planning work for thousands more in a geographically sensitive area close to Jerusalem. Critics say this plan would kill off Palestinian hopes of a viable state.

Netanyahu's current religious-nationalist government looks likely to be replaced with a coalition more accommodating of the Palestinians.

The runners-up in the Jan. 22 ballot, the centrist Yesh Atid and left-leaning Labor parties, both demand Israel try to revive peacemaking stalled for more than two years.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560476>

- **Palestinian civil servants to continue strike**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- The civil servants union in the West Bank decided on Tuesday to go ahead with protests against the Palestinian Authority's failure to pay salaries.

Civil servants will not work Wednesday in protest of the government's broken promise to distribute an unpaid portion of November's paychecks, the head of the civil servants union said.

"Payment of the remaining portion of November salary serves only the highly paid employees, and so employees will be on strike Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday," Bassam Zakarna said.

"The government must pay January's salary so as to be able to go back to work. Employees can't afford to pay for transportation," he added.



Meanwhile, the general union of teachers said classes would resume Wednesday and Thursday across the West Bank after officials agreed to meet representatives to discuss the crisis.

Bassam Naim, a spokesman for the union, said a committee of experts, teachers and government officials would meet in the hopes of coming to an agreement.

Since early December, Israel has withheld around \$100 million in monthly tax revenue it collects on behalf of the PA, aggravating a financial crisis.

Full salaries for public sector workers have not been paid in almost three months and government initiatives to increase revenue by collecting years worth of electricity and water bills from the public have been hampered by street protests.

Israel has previously frozen payments to the PA during times of heightened security and diplomatic tensions, provoking strong international criticism, such as when the UN cultural body UNESCO granted the Palestinians full membership a year ago.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560410>

- **Israel boycotts UN rights scrutiny session**

GENEVA (Reuters) -- Israel boycotted a United Nations human rights forum on

Tuesday where it was due to have its record reviewed, setting a precedent feared by many Western and other states.

The current president of the Human Rights Council, Poland's ambassador Remigiusz Henczel, noted the absence of the Israeli delegation and ordered the meeting suspended briefly to decide how to proceed.

He called it "an important issue and unprecedented situation", inviting comment by the council's 47 members as well as observer states.

Israel, which would be expected to face criticism for its practices in the Palestinian territories, suspended relations with the council last May because of what it called an inherent bias against it.

Israel's last review was in December 2008, when it attended. Diplomats said last week that they feared an unprecedented boycott would lead other countries to follow suit to avoid scrutiny of their human rights records.

"As the only recalcitrant state among 193, Israel's deliberate absence would

sabotage the principle of universality," Peter Splinter, Geneva representative of Amnesty International to the UN in Geneva, said in a blog on Tuesday.

Meanwhile 15 Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations warned of the far-reaching consequences of Israel's refusal to fully cooperate with the United Nations.

"This lack of transparency will not only mean that Israel avoids rigorous criticism of its violations of international law, but that the entire UPR system will be undermined by the loss of its two fundamental principles: equality and universality," the groups said in a statement.

US human rights ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, speaking to reporters last week, said of the US ally: "We have encouraged Israel to come to the UPR, to tell its story, to present its own narrative of its human rights situation. We think it is a good opportunity to do that."

A team of UN investigators, set up by the council last year, is due to report soon on

whether Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories violate international human rights law.

The initiative was brought to the 47-member forum by the Palestinian Authority. Israel's ally the United States was the only member to vote against it.

The council said Israel's planned construction of new housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem undermined the peace process and posed a threat to the two-state solution and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Israel's Foreign Ministry condemned the decision at the time, saying: "The establishment of this mission is another blatant expression of the singling out of Israel in the UNHRC."

The Ministry also vowed that Israel would not cooperate with the fact-finding mission will and will not allow its members to enter Israel or the Palestinian territories.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560323>

- **80 MK-elects to recommend Netanyahu as prime minister**

PM hopes to finish building gov't in time for potential meeting with Obama in March; Lapid, Bennett meet to coordinate strategy for talks; Shas, UTJ hope to enlist Bayit Yehudi for bloc against yeshiva students draft.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will receive an endorsement from 80 MK-elects over the next two days as the 12 factions in the incoming Knesset make their recommendations to President Shimon Peres.

Peres will receive the official results of last Tuesday's election on Wednesday evening from the head of the Central Elections Committee, Justice Elyakim Rubinstein. The president will receive delegations on Wednesday night from the two largest Knesset factions, Likud Beytenu and Yesh Atid. He will hold consultations with the remaining 10 factions from the largest to the smallest on Thursday and most likely formally grant Netanyahu the right to form the government on Friday.

Netanyahu will receive recommendations from Yesh Atid and the four factions on the Right.

Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid and the party's incoming MKs Mickey Levy and Pnina Tamnu-Shata intend to tell Peres that they endorse Netanyahu because they believe the largest party should form the government.

Labor (15 seats) and The Tzipi Livni Party (6) are not expected to recommend any candidate, but a source tied to Livni said there was a small chance that she would recommend herself, in order to keep her promise that she would recommend the leader of one of the parties in the Center-Left bloc.

From the moment that Peres entrusts Netanyahu with forming a coalition, he will have 28 days to form a new government.

If an extension is required, the president has the authority to grant an additional 14 days.

Netanyahu received an extension when he formed his last coalition four years ago.

But this time, the prime minister has added incentive to complete coalition talks on time and present his government to Peres by February 28.

Three days after that, the national policy conference of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee will begin in Washington. Netanyahu has not confirmed his participation in the event due to the coalition talks. But if the negotiations run smoothly and Netanyahu forms a coalition on time, he will be able to attend the conference and meet with US President Barack Obama in Washington with a new government behind him.

“Any prime minister wants to finish coalition negotiations within a week,” a senior Likud politician close to Netanyahu said. “There will be ups and downs. Many parties want to be in the coalition, but that does not make them more flexible.”

Lapid met with Bayit Yehudi chairman Naftali Bennett on Tuesday for the first time since the election to coordinate their strategy for the talks. Spokeswomen for the two party leaders refused to disclose

any details of the meeting or even confirm that it took place.

Bayit Yehudi faction chairman Uri Orbach said following a meeting of his party’s MK-elects in Ariel that Netanyahu could not take his party for granted.

“We are not a faction of three MKs that would be satisfied with just the Science and Technology Ministry like last time,” Orbach said. “We are not joining at any price without conditions.”

Shas and United Torah Judaism leaders also met on Tuesday to discuss their strategy for coalition negotiations.

UTJ MK Yisrael Eichler’s office said that serious efforts were under way with Shas “to form a political bloc against the attempts to draft yeshiva students,” adding that the two parties were also trying to enlist the support of Bayit Yehudi toward this goal.

Another party official said that although the two parties would be negotiating separately within the official coalition negotiations, they may appoint a joint team to discuss the issue of haredi

enlistment. He added that the party sees very little possibility of sitting together with Yesh Atid.



“It is in Netanyahu’s hands, but if Lapid wants to drag yeshiva students out of the study hall then we won’t be able to join a coalition with him,” he said, highlighting what he called the haredi parties’ political value to the prime minister as reliable coalition partners during the last government.

Senior UTJ MK Moshe Gafni pointed out on Tuesday that the combined haredi representation in the new Knesset – 18 MKs – is very close to Yesh Atid’s 19, and party sources expressed optimism that Netanyahu may form a coalition without Lapid’s party.

Following reports that Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Ya’alon (Likud) met recently with Gafni, one UTJ official said that Ya’alon’s proposal for increasing

haredi enlistment in national service, made last year, was something the party could live with.

Outgoing coalition chairman Ze’ev Elkin (Likud) said he already received an impression before the 18th Knesset was dissolved that UTJ would accept the Ya’alon plan as a last resort, even though it did not like it.

A Shas source noted that his party was able to make more concessions than UTJ on the issue of enlistment, whose “red lines are closer and more stringent than ours.”

Nevertheless, he said, the purpose of the recent leadership meetings was “to coordinate positions” on the issue ahead of the negotiations.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=301473>

- **Israel summons envoy over Iran-Argentina panel**

A lack of resolve following the 1992 bombing of Israel’s Embassy might be what led to the even deadlier attack two years later at the Buenos Aires Jewish

community center, a senior Foreign Ministry official told Argentina's ambassador on Tuesday.

Yitzhak Shoham, the Foreign Ministry's deputy director-general for Latin America, summoned ambassador Atilio Norberto Molteni to protest Buenos Aires's decision to establish a "truth commission" with Iran to investigate the 1994 Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) bombing that killed 85 people, and wounded hundreds more. The bombing at the Israeli Embassy killed 29.

"A lack of resolve in dealing with terrorism sends a message of weakness," Shoham said.



"Had Argentina dealt resolutely with the 1992 attack on the Israeli Embassy, the 1994 AMIA bombing might not have happened."

Shoham said that Israel was "astonished and disappointed" at the Argentinean government's decision to collaborate with Iran after its "responsibility for the bombing of the AMIA Jewish Community Center was exposed by the investigation conducted by the Argentinean authorities themselves."

Shoham also protested "the unacceptable attitude of the Argentinean government towards Israel since the beginning of

contacts between Buenos Aires and Tehran.”

Shoham said that although the Argentinean authorities themselves exposed the “great resemblance” between the attacks and the involvement of Iran and Hezbollah in carrying them out, “Argentina has not responded to Israel’s legitimate requests to be informed of its new diplomatic moves with Iran, nor of the way in which Argentina envisages bringing the perpetrators to justice.”

Shoham said that Argentina’s behavior in this affair was “particularly disappointing” given the “intimate relationship to which Israel is accustomed with Argentina, a very friendly country.”

The “truth commission” agreement was signed on Sunday in Addis Ababa by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and Argentine Foreign Minister Hector Timerman who were attending an Organization of African Union summit.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=301467>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

• Mali secures retaken towns, donors pledge funds

French-backed Malian troops searched house-to-house in Gao and Timbuktu on Tuesday uncovering arms and explosives abandoned by Islamist fighters, and France said it would look to hand over longer-term security operations in Mali to an African force.

An 18-day offensive in France's former West African colony has pushed the militants out of major towns and into hideouts in the deserts and mountains.

French and Malian troops retook the two Saharan trading towns of Timbuktu and Gao at the weekend virtually unopposed.

Doubts remain about just how quickly the African intervention force, known as AFISMA and now expected to exceed 8,000 troops, could be fully deployed in Mali to hunt down and eradicate retreating al Qaeda-allied insurgents in the north.

International donors meeting in Addis Ababa pledged just over \$455 million for

the Mali crisis, but it was not clear whether all of this would go directly to AFISMA, which African leaders have estimated will cost almost \$1 billion.

"You will certainly understand that it is not sufficient. But I think it is only the beginning. We hope that it will continue, and that the money we need will come," Malian interim President Dioncounda Traore told reporters in Addis Ababa.

He earlier announced his government would aim to organize "credible" elections for July 31 in response to demands from major western backers of the anti-rebel action.

Malian soldiers combed through the dusty alleys and mud-brick homes of Gao and Timbuktu. In Gao, they arrested at least five suspected rebels and sympathizers, turned over by local people, and uncovered caches of weapons and counterfeit money.

Residents reported some looting of shops in Timbuktu owned by Arabs and Tuaregs suspected of having helped the Islamists who had occupied the world-famous seat

of Islamic learning, a UNESCO World Heritage site, since last year.

Fleeing Islamist fighters torched a Timbuktu library holding priceless ancient manuscripts, damaging many.

Malian army sources told Reuters pockets of armed Islamist fighters, on foot to avoid French air strikes, were still hiding in the savannah and deserts around Gao and Timbuktu and near main roads leading to them, parts of which were still unsafe.

The West African country has been in political limbo since a March 2012 coup triggered the rebel takeover of the north.

France has sent around 3,000 troops to Mali at the request of its government but is anxious not to get bogged down in a messy counter-insurgency war in their former Sahel colony.

The French have also made clear that while the first phase of liberating the biggest north Mali towns may be over, a more difficult challenge to flush the Islamist desert insurgents from their lairs remains.

"We will stay as long as necessary. We want to make sure there will be a good handover between France and AFISMA. There is no question of us getting stuck in the mud," French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said in Addis Ababa.

More funds needed

The leading donors pledging funds in Addis Ababa were Japan, the European Union and the United States. But African Union officials could not immediately break down how much was intended for the African intervention force, how much for Mali's army and how much for broader humanitarian purposes.

"The participants are of the view there is a need to continue to work together to mobilize further resources," said AU Peace and Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra.

Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara, who chairs the West African bloc ECOWAS that is contributing the most troops for the African Mali force, estimated its cost at more than \$950 million.

The United States and European governments are backing the French and African military operation against the Islamist rebels with logistical, airlift and intelligence support, but they are not sending combat troops.

They see the intervention as vital to root out an al Qaeda-allied insurgency in West Africa that could threaten African governments and western interests from Mauritania to oil-producing Nigeria, as well as strike directly in Europe.

The head of the U.N. mission in Libya, Tarek Mitri, told the Security Council the French-led military intervention could worsen a "precarious" security situation inside Libya by pushing fighters and arms across its porous Saharan borders.

US drones for Niger

The bulk of the planned African intervention force for Mali is still struggling to get into the country, hampered by shortages of kit and supplies and lack of airlift capacity.

Around 2,000 troops are already on the ground to fight the retreating Islamist

rebels, who have pulled back to the rugged northeast mountains of the Adrar des Ifoghas range on the border with Algeria.

Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Niger and Chad are providing soldiers. Burundi and other nations have pledged to contribute. Hundreds of soldiers from Chad and Niger with desert warfare experience have already crossed into the country.

The commander of the Chadian forces in Mali, Abdu Aziz Hassan Adam, told Reuters in Gao his forces were ready to "sweep the terrorists out of the north of Mali". "They are a threat for all the countries of the world," he added.

Britain said on Tuesday up to 240 soldiers could take part in missions to train troops in Mali in addition to at least 90 already taking part in logistical operations.

The United States also extended deployment of surveillance drones that could track down rebel bases and columns in the Sahara desert. Mali's neighbor Niger on Tuesday gave permission for U.S. drones to fly from its territory.

Tuaregs hold Kidal

Besides Gao and Timbuktu, another major Malian Saharan town, Kidal, had also been in Islamist insurgent hands but MNLA Tuareg rebels said on Monday they had taken control there after the Islamists left.

The MNLA's Tuareg leaders, whose pro-independence rebellion that seized the northern half of Mali last year was hijacked by Islamist radicals leading to the current crisis, said their desert fighters were ready to join the French-led campaign against "terrorist organizations" - a reference to al Qaeda and its allies.

But they also asked for direct negotiations with the Malian government about their autonomy demands.

Chadian troops were expected to deploy up to Kidal in the northeast to secure it, officials in Niger said.

Besides the funds being pledged at the Addis Ababa donors' conference, the International Monetary Fund approved a rapid loan of \$18.4 million for Mali's government.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mali-secures-retaken-towns-donors-pledge-funds>

- **Morsy instructs police to deal with 'rioters' with restraint**

President Mohamed Morsy met on Tuesday afternoon with the interior minister and other ministry leaders.



Presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali said Morsy gave instructions to protect peaceful protesters by firmly dealing with troublemakers, rioters and outlaws, yet with utmost restraint and in accordance with the law.

Morsy's instructions came as protests continue in Cairo and across several governorates.

In Cairo, scores of demonstrators on Tuesday evening blocked the 6 October Bridge and lit tires to disrupt traffic.

Meanwhile, clashes involving stones and tear gas continued between demonstrators and security forces around Qasr al-Nil Bridge, leading to dozens of injuries.

The clashes extended to Simon Bolivar Square at the cement barrier that protects the US embassy, and the authorities turned off the lights of the square.

In Alexandria, hundreds staged a peaceful demonstration on Tuesday, with the participation of members of the Popular Trend, the Karama Party, Kefaya and 6 April movements, and the National Salvation Front, demanding that the president step down.

They blocked the Corniche and threatened to escalate protests if their demands are not met. They also demanded the sacking of the interior minister for using excessive violence against demonstrators.

In Suez, protesters started gathering at Arbaeen Square downtown defying

curfew for the second night late Tuesday evening. The protesters raised Egypt's flag and chanted anti-Muslim Brotherhood slogans.

In Port Said, nearly 20 thousands protesters from all over the governorate gathered in the area surrounding Mariam Mosque in Al-Manakh district defying the curfew imposed in the city. The protesters chanted slogans against President Mohamed Morsy and pledged to continue breaching the curfew.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-instructs-police-deal-rioters-restraint>

- **Terrorists target Algeria gas pipeline**

Another al-Qaeda attack on an Algerian energy facility turned deadly Sunday night (January 27th) in Djebahia.

Terrorists targeted a camp where guards were keeping watch over a gas pipeline linking Bouira and Tizi Ouzou. The assault left three Algerian security guards dead and seven injured, Tout sur l'Algerie reported on Monday (January 28th).

The victims reportedly prevented al-Qaeda's El Farouk brigade from blowing up the Sonatrach pipeline.

After the attack, "the army was deployed in the region and launched a massive combing operation", the source added.

Aside from the criminal act itself, it is the terrorists' choice of target which is worrying the Algerian public and authorities. Once again, terrorists have targeted the very heart of the national economy: gas facilities.

Since the In Amenas hostage crisis, Algerian officials have agreed that security arrangements at strategic oil and gas sites should be reviewed.

In a statement given to Associated Press on Saturday, Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci said that it was necessary to reassess and reinforce security at oil and gas installations.

"The attack at In Amenas probably makes it necessary for both Algeria, as the host country for these investments, and also companies operating in Algeria to reassess

security arrangements with a view to reinforcing them," Medelci said.

"What happened at In Amenas will probably lead to some adjustments in this regard," he added.

Meanwhile, Energy Minister Youcef Yousfi said Sunday that Algerian authorities would "conduct a review of security arrangements at industrial facilities".

Yousfi had previously given assurance during a visit to the In Amenas complex on January 21st that "Algeria has the means necessary to make its energy installations secure".

"We will strengthen security and we will rely first and foremost on our own means," Yousfi said at the time.

The gas complex at In Amenas, which produces 8 billion cubic metres of gas per year, is jointly operated by BP, Sonatrach and Statoil. The British giant is responsible for internal security at the site and the Algerian gendarmerie is responsible for external security.

Internal security officers are unarmed. BP said it did not feel it was necessary to request armed security guards prior to the terrorist attack because of the significant presence of security officers.

"We and Statoil decided not to have armed guards on site. Given the large military presence in the area, we took the view that armed guards were not required on the site," BP spokesman Robert Wine told the New York Times.

After the terrorist attack on the In Amenas complex, Norwegian company Statoil announced its intention to review existing security measures.

"We will go through all elements of this terrible event, including questions connected to security," said Bard Glad Pedersen, a Statoil spokesman. The company had ultimately underestimated the risks in Algeria, according to Stein Bredal, a former member of the Statoil board.

Tunisia is also looking to step up security at oil and gas facilities. TAP quoted security sources as saying Tuesday that special combat units were set up to

monitor the various sites in the wake of events in the Sahara.

"This measure is prevention against any terrorist act targeting these fields, especially those located on the Tunisian-Algerian border," TAP quoted the security official as saying.

Extra troops and military equipment have also been sent to the barracks at Remada and Dehiba, along the Tunisia-Libya border, AFP reported.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/01/29/feature-01

- **Tunisia confronts security challenges**

Tunisia is at risk of becoming a hotbed for terrorism, a security conference in Tunis concluded.

Regional crises and the rise in extremism threaten Tunisia's national security, analysts agreed Saturday (January 26th) in the capital.

The recent dismantling of an al-Qaeda cell in Tunisia, which recruited fighters for

Mali, shows the sensitive geo-strategic position of the country, political figure Azhar Bali said.

Tunisia has become a vital corridor for terrorist groups, he added. Bali stressed the need to develop a solid security approach that would curtail the ambitions of terrorist groups in the Maghreb and Mali.



The latest statistics show that Tunisia is among the most vulnerable to the spread of terrorist groups, weapons and drugs traffickers, Bali explained.

"I don't know why some young people join terrorist gangs; they kill and get killed, and thus become the first victims of terrorism," he told Magharebia.

Al-Amen Party leader Mohamed Naamoune echoed the same sentiment: "The precarious political and security

atmosphere and the deteriorating economic and social conditions in Tunisia after the revolution have made the country a fertile ground more than ever for extremist ideologies that feed terrorism."

"The changes that took place in Libya and the resulting widespread arms proliferation, as well as the activities of extremist groups in Algeria and Mali, must be taken into consideration upon conducting strategic studies and engaging in joint security coordination with neighbouring countries," he added.

Naamoune stressed the need to address the social and economic problems of marginalised youth as a means to prevent them from falling prey to the terrorism.

Tunisians are indeed fighting among armed Islamic groups. Some 11 Tunisians out of 32 militants were involved in Algeria's In Amenas events.

"There are about 500 jihadist Tunisians, mostly affiliated to al-Qaeda, in several areas across the world," Alaya Allani, an expert on Islamist groups, said. "There are

several Tunisian fighters affiliated with al-Qaeda in northern Mali."

Security researcher Moncef Kartass added that the precarious economic and social conditions of many Tunisians motivate some to engage in arms smuggling, drug trafficking and hostage-taking.

"Recent developments in North Africa have made it a suitable ground for smuggling and all types of organised crime committed by terrorist groups," he noted. "The Tunisian desert has become one of the most vital corridors for them and an important centre for their activities, whether in terms of smuggling or stockpiling arms."

Political analyst Salaheddine Jourchi commented: "After the revolution, Tunisia became... a country with precarious security that facilitated the work of armed gangs and organised crime gangs," he said.

Participants in the forum stressed the need to reform the security apparatus. They added that all political forces must unify their efforts to enhance peace.

Tunisia needs to work with neighbouring countries to contain the terrorist tide and consolidate the stability of the state, the security experts added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/01/29/feature-02

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Suleiman arrives in Kuwait**

Lebanese President Michel Suleiman arrived on Wednesday to Kuwait to participate in the UN donor conference that will be held later in the day to collect donations for countries facing difficulties handling the large numbers of people fleeing Syria's violence.

Suleiman was accompanied by a ministerial delegation including Deputy Prime Minister Samir Moqbel, Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour and Social Affairs Minister Wael Abu Faour.

He was received at the airport by Kuwaiti Crown Prince Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other prominent Kuwaiti officials.

Lebanon is facing difficulties dealing with the increasingly high number of refugees fleeing Syria's violent uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has killed more than 60,000 people since its outbreak in March 2011.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonews/suleiman_arrives_in_kuwait

- **March 8 MPs not against election postponement**

Development and Liberation bloc MP Yassin Jaber on Wednesday said that there was no problem with postponing the upcoming parliamentary elections for technical reasons.

"If a new electoral law was agreed upon, and we needed some time [to prepare for it], then there would be no problem with a small and technical postponement," Jaber told the Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio.

However, the MP said that he supported the extension of the work of the sub-committee tasked to discuss the electoral law so that the parliamentary elections can be held on time.

Meanwhile, Change and Reform bloc MP Naji Gharios said that several figures from the March 14 coalition and the cabinet have voiced their desire that the parliamentary elections be postponed for technical reasons.

“Postponing the elections [for] technical [reasons] means that we do not have enough time to agree on a new electoral law [and] prepare for it,” Gharios added.

On Tuesday, Lebanon’s electoral committee tasked to discuss proposals for a new electoral law finalized its report for submission to the joint-parliamentary committee Wednesday, which Future bloc MPs threatened to boycott.

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

The Future Movement and independent March 14 Christian figures have publicly rejected the Orthodox Gathering’s proposal, which calls for citizens to vote for candidates of their own religious sect. However, Lebanon’s four main Christian

parties have expressed support for the draft law.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/march_8_mps_not_against_election_postponement

- **Berri: Joint committee meeting not decisive**

Speaker Nabih Berri said in remarks published on Wednesday that no decisive moves would be taken during the meeting of the joint-parliamentary committee, which is scheduled to be held later in the day despite the Future bloc and Lebanese Forces’ intentions to boycott the session.

“Unlike the parliament plenary sessions, the meetings of the joint-parliamentary committee are not decision-making [in nature],” Berri said in an interview with An-Nahar newspaper.

He added that the meeting would be held to assess the report finalized Tuesday by the sub-committee tasked to discuss a new electoral law.

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political players remain divided over the electoral law issue.

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

6. SYRIA

- **Deputy FM to Represent Iran in Kuwait Conference on Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian is due to represent Tehran in a conference due to be held in Kuwait on the situation of Syrian refugees.



The one-day conference which kicks off on Wednesday is headed by the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon and is hosted by Emir of Kuwait.

Senior officials of countries which want to help Syrian refugees will attend the conference.

Iran has helped Syrian refugees from the beginning of the crisis in the country. Earlier this month, Iran sent its first major humanitarian aid cargo to Beirut to help the Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The consignment was handed over to the Lebanese high council of humanitarian aid in Beirut port in a ceremony attended by the Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon Qazandar Roknabadi.

The cargo is the first 10,000 packs of a total 30,000 aid packs sent by Iran to the

Syrian refugees, and include canned food, tents, and other basic commodities.

Addressing the ceremony, Roknabadi voiced Iran's firm support for the Syrian nation and government in their efforts to restore security and stability and work out a political solution to the crisis in their country.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107140080>

- **In Syria's Aleppo, a horrific new massacre**

Aleppo massacre

The volunteer lifts the corpse into a truck where a dozen already lie. As he does, the stretchers come one after another, each carrying another body retrieved from the river, most bearing gunshots to the head.

"We do not know who they are—they were not carrying papers," he laments.

At the bank of the river in northern Syria, dozens of bodies in civilian clothes lie lifeless, covered in mud. Many of them bear wounds indicating gunshots at close range, and so are unrecognizable.

"We will take them to families to identify them," rebel captain Abu Sada offers. "Those who we cannot identify, we will bury in a common grave."

The bodies are among those of nearly 80 young men, all executed with a single gunshot to the head and neck, that were recovered on Tuesday from Quweiq River, which runs through Aleppo city.

A monitoring group said the death toll was at least 65, but added it could still rise significantly, and a rebel fighter put the figure at 78 dead, with more bodies still being retrieved from the water.

Near the river, hundreds of residents flock to the scene to see if they can spot a father, a brother, a son, or a husband.

"My brother disappeared a few weeks ago, since he went into an area controlled by the regime," says Mohammed Abdulassis. "We don't know anything about him; I came to look for him."

"It's possible he's here," he adds as he inspects a body covered in mud.

According to Abu Sada, around 30 bodies are still in the river, but cannot be recovered because of regime snipers positioned in a nearby neighborhood.

"There must be over 100—many are still in the river, and we will try to retrieve them," he says.

Abu Anas, another rebel fighter, notes this is not the first time he and his comrades have discovered multiple corpses at the same time, but adds, "never this many."

The bodies are taken to a school in the Yarmuk neighborhood, and placed on the ground, covered with a blue cloth.

Each has a number beside it.

A nurse inspecting the bodies says, "There are those who drowned because they were shot in the legs or abdomen before being thrown into the water," and notes that some of the victims may have been killed as far back as three days ago.

In the school yard, the smell is nauseating, and families pass in front of the bodies, covering their faces with tissues or their clothes.

Only the faces of the victims are visible to passers-by, so they can be identified and buried.

"These are civilians—there is a child among them who was also executed in cold blood," says Abu Saij, a rebel fighter. "Ordinarily, we would retrieve two or three bodies in a day—never before have we seen such a thing."

"Yesterday, they [pro-regime forces] were unable to take control of Bustan al-Qasr [a neighborhood in southwest Aleppo], and so they took revenge," Abu Saij continues.

"Some of these corpses date back several days, but most were executed recently."

A senior government security source said many of the victims were from Bustan al-Qasr and had been reported kidnapped earlier.

He accused "terrorists," the standard regime term for people fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad, of the killings and spreading propaganda to deflect responsibility.

But Abu Saij insists rebels are not to blame.

"The regime threw them into the river so that they would arrive in an area under our control, so the people would think we killed them," he says.

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

- **Brahimi: Syria destroyed 'bit by bit'**

The nearly two-year-old conflict in Syria is destroying the country "bit by bit" and the UN Security Council must take action, UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said Tuesday.

"The Security Council simply cannot continue to say 'we are in disagreement, therefore let's wait for better times'... They have got to grapple with this problem now," Brahimi told reporters after briefing the Council.

"If a little more pressure is brought to bear, maybe a little bit more progress will be made," the former Algerian foreign minister said.

Brahimi said that even though he had "not made much progress" in his efforts to bring an end to a conflict that has left more than 60,000 people dead, he would not stop trying.

"I am not a quitter," he said, however adding: "The moment I feel I am totally useless, I will not stay a minute more."

Brahimi was scheduled to have dinner later Tuesday with the UN envoys from the Council's five permanent veto-wielding members—Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

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

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **UAE arrests Pakistan fugitive over graft scandal**

Pakistan's fugitive former oil and gas chief has been arrested in Abu Dhabi on suspicion of embezzling \$850 million in a scandal that could spark a criminal case

against the prime minister, an official said Wednesday.

Tauqir Sadiq was arrested a week after Pakistan's top court ordered a case to be registered against Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf over the matter, raising pressure on the government as it nears the end of its five-year term in office.

Sadiq is accused of taking \$850 million in kickbacks and commissions while head of Pakistan's oil and gas regulatory authority between 2009 and 2011, at a time when Ashraf was water and power minister. Sadiq fled Pakistan last year.

"We can confirm his arrest. He has been detained in Abu Dhabi," said Zafar Iqbal, spokesperson for Pakistan's anti-corruption National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which has been investigating the graft allegations.

Iqbal told AFP that Sadiq could return to Pakistan "in the next few days" and "as soon as the legal formalities are complete."

The next Supreme Court hearing in the case is due on Thursday.

On January 24, the court ordered a case to be registered against Ashraf, Interior Minister Rehman Malik and another senior member of the main ruling Pakistan People's Party over Sadiq's appointment in 2009 and absconding in 2012.

The court has also ordered Ashraf's arrest over another corruption probe dating back to his tenure as water and power minister.

Members of the government accuse judges of waging a politically motivated witch hunt against the administration, which in March 2013 will become the first elected civilian government in Pakistan to complete a full term in office.

In June last year, the Supreme Court sacked Ashraf's predecessor over his refusal to ask Switzerland to reopen corruption cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/uae_arrests_pakistan_fugitive_over_graft_scandal

- **18 die as Yemen military attacks kidnapers, say sources**

Two soldiers and 16 Al-Qaeda militants were killed on Tuesday in a Yemeni military offensive against the jihadists who are suspected of holding Western hostages, sources said.

"Sixteen Al-Qaeda fighters were killed in four raids when the Yemeni aviation targeted positions near Manaseh," a stronghold of the terror network in the province of Bayda, a tribal source said on condition of anonymity.

An official in the region reported the death of two soldiers in a car bomb explosion targeting an army position near the town of Radah, 30 kilometers (18 miles) to the west.

A suicide car bomb at a checkpoint in the same area killed 11 soldiers and wounded 17 others on Monday, in an attack blamed on Al-Qaeda.

Another three people were killed in an army operation launched late on Sunday against Al-Qaeda-linked militants suspected of holding an Austrian and two Finns hostage in Manaseh, in Bayda province, tribal sources said.

The army is hunting three militants accused of holding the European hostages and who have refused to surrender despite mediation efforts.

The three men -- brothers of Tarek al-Dahab, an Al-Qaeda leader killed in a February 2012 attack -- deny they are holding the hostages.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/18-die-as-yemen-military-attacks-kidnappers-say-sources>

- **Bahrain's opposition societies set terms for talks**

Government says talks are serious, insists on coordination role

Manama: Bahrain's opposition societies said that they have agreed to take part in a national dialogue that is expected to help end a political deadlock.

However, the Al Wafaq Islamic Society, the National Action Democratic Society, the Democratic Nationalist Rally Society, the Unionist Democratic National Rally Society, the Progressive Democratic Tribune and the National Brotherhood Society — in a letter addressed to the

justice minister — set their own terms for the talks and insisted on the participation of representatives from the government as interlocutors.

Last week, Samira Rajab, the State Minister for Information Affairs and the official spokesperson for the government, said that the government would oversee and coordinate the dialogue but not participate in it.

In announcing the “resumption of the national dialogue”, the government said that the talks would be on political issues, implying that the non-political issues had been addressed at the national dialogue held in July 2011 when around 300 representatives from NGOs, trade unions, parliament, government, media and women’s rights groups convened and agreed on a series of recommendations.

On Wednesday, the justice ministry said that it contacted the country’s political formations to nominate their representatives to the dialogue and expected them to provide the names this week.

However, the opposition societies did not give any names and insisted that a specific timeframe for the start and end of the talks should be announced.

The number of representatives from the opposition should equal that of the government and the outcome of the dialogue should be specific constitutional formulas and not recommendations, the societies said.

However, Samira Rajab in remarks published by the London-based Al Sharq Al Awsat on Tuesday said that the government was serious about the talks and insisted on the role of the parliament in endorsing the outcome of the dialogue.

“The implementation of the dialogue recommendations will be similar to what happened after the earlier talks,” she said, referring to the July 2011 dialogue. “The implementation will be through the constitutional institutions which cannot, in any way, be cancelled, ignored or marginalised.”

On Sunday evening, ten political societies, representing the rest of the political landscape in Bahrain, said that they would

take part in the dialogue, but called for an end to the acts of street violence to help create a more auspicious setting for the talks.

The sharp divergences between the various political factions reflect the formidable difficulties Bahrain is facing as it tries to bridge gaps and charter a new way forward for the country following the worst crisis in its modern history.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-s-opposition-societies-set-terms-for-talks-1.1139308>

- **More curbs on Saudi religious police powers**

Interrogating suspects and pressing charges will be restricted to the police

Riyadh: Saudi Arabia has set new limitations on the powers of its notorious religious police, charged with ensuring compliance with Islamic morality but often accused of abuses, its chief said on Tuesday.

The Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice “once had much expanded powers, but with the new

system... some of these powers, such as interrogating suspects and pressing charges,” will be restricted to the police and public prosecution, Shaikh Abdul Latif Abdel Aziz Al Shaikh told AFP.

The religious police may still arrest those carrying out “flagrant offences such as harassing women, consuming alcohol and drugs, blackmail and the practice of witchcraft,” Shaikh said of the new law approved by the cabinet.

However, the cases of such people will be referred to the police and brought to justice, as the religious police will no longer have the right to determine charges against them, he said.

The religious police will also continue to prevent women from driving, ban public entertainment and force all businesses, from supermarkets to petrol stations, to close for prayers five times a day.

Relatively moderate Al Shaikh, appointed last year, has raised hopes that a more lenient force will ease draconian social constraints in deeply conservative Islamic country.

Two weeks into his post, Al Shaikh banned volunteers from serving in the commission, which enforces the kingdom's strict Islamic rules.

Later, he went further, prohibiting harassment and threatening "decisive measures against violators."

In June, Al Shaikh came out strongly against one of his men who ordered a woman to leave a mall because she was wearing nail polish.

The woman had defied the orders as she filmed her argument with the policeman and posted it on YouTube.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/more-curbs-on-saudi-religious-police-powers-1.1139502>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Karzai Warns Of Foreign Interference In Peace Talks**

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

January 29, 2013

KABUL -- Afghan President Hamid Karzai says peace efforts with the Taliban should go through the High Peace Council set up by the Afghan government.

On January 29, Karzai warned his political opponents not to engage in negotiations that bypass the government.

He claimed foreign powers have approached some Afghan opposition power brokers and political groups to hold talks with the Taliban via side channels.

Karzai urged them to refuse such offers. He said the peace process will only have a good outcome when the country is unified.

Karzai also said foreign powers, including the United States, Western countries, and Afghanistan's neighbors, should not try to interfere with Afghan peace talks.

The High Peace Council was established in 2010 to lead efforts to negotiate with the Taliban.

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

- **'Local Afghan police chief assassinated in Kapisa'**

Press TV

January 29, 2013

A local Afghan police chief has been assassinated in Afghanistan's eastern province of Kapisa, Press TV reports.

The unknown gunmen opened fire at Syed Mushtaq Sadat, the police chief of Hesa Duwum Kohistan district, near his home in Saha-e-Jamal area on Tuesday, officials say.

Kapisa provincial governor spokesperson Qais Qaderi said that five suspects have been arrested in relation to the deadly shooting.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

The wave of attacks has been rampant in war-torn Afghanistan during the past week.

On Saturday, 11 people were killed in a roadside bomb attack targeting an Afghan police truck packed with officers and

detainees in the southern province of Kandahar.

Meanwhile, at least 10 policemen have lost their lives and 18 others sustained injuries wounded in a bomb attack carried out in northeastern city of Kunduz on the same day.

Militant groups always carry out deadly attacks against Afghan forces, foreign troops and civilians.

In the first six months of 2012, over 1,140 Afghan civilians were killed and around 2,000 were wounded, mostly by roadside bombs, according to statistics released by the United Nations. Thirty percent of the casualties were women and children.

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

- **6 US-led troops killed in bomb blast in Afghanistan: Taliban**

Press TV

January 29, 2013

Taliban say at least six US-led troopers have been killed in a roadside bomb attack in eastern war-torn Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed that the incident occurred on Tuesday when a tank belonging to foreign forces hit an improvised explosive device (IED) in Narkh district of Wardak province.

Mujahid says the tank was completely destroyed.

Locals in the area also said that a blast targeted a tank in the area, adding that choppers of US-led foreign forces soon arrived at the scene of the attack to transfer the injured to hospital.

The US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has not made any comments on the incident.

Militant groups use improvised explosive devices, including roadside bombs, against Afghan forces, foreign troops and civilians.

According to i-casualties.org, more than eight US-led soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan so far this year, as the total casualties stood at 3257 since the start of the US-led war in the country.

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

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

- **28 militants give up fighting in N Afghan province**

PUL-E-KHUMRI, Afghanistan, Jan. 29 (Xinhua) -- More than two dozen anti-government militants gave up fighting and joined the government-backed peace process in Baghlan province 160 km north of Kabul on Tuesday.

"Today 28 dissident brothers who were active against government in Baghlan-e-Markazi district laid down arms, joined the peace process and resumed normal life," provincial police chief Assadullah Shirzad said in a ceremony here to welcome the former militants.

The former fighters, had association with the radical group of Islamic party the Hizb-e-Islami, Shirzad said, saying with joining these people to peace process the security

will be further improved in Baghlan province.

Meantime, the Hekmatyar-led Hizb-e-Islami which has been supporting Taliban war against Afghan and NATO-led troops has yet to comment.

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

- **Pakistani army to begin training Afghan security forces**

By Meena Haseeb - 29 Jan 2013, 11:54 am

Khaama Press

Islamabad and Kabul are close to signing a deal that will allow the Pakistan Army to train Afghan national security forces, in the latest sign of improving ties between the neighboring nations, The Express Tribune reported.

Visiting Afghan Defense Minister General Bismillah Khan Muhammadi on Monday held talks with Pakistan army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani and discussed defense cooperation.

The Afghan defense minister, leading a six-member high-level defense delegation,

arrived in Pakistan on Sunday for talks on defense cooperation and border coordination to boost anti-terror cooperation between the two countries.

The two sides discussed matters of professional interest, with particular focus on enhancing mutual defence cooperation and measures that Afghan and Pakistan forces intend for an enduring training relationship, according to a statement released by the Inter Services Public Relations.

Operationalization of the recently concluded agreement on Tripartite Border Standing Operating Procedures was also discussed in detail.

The agreement is aimed at improving existing security cooperation and intelligence sharing mechanisms, on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border.

Pakistan has long been offering Afghanistan to train its army but, until now, Kabul had shown little interest, largely due to the trust deficit between the two countries.

General Kayani told the Afghan defence minister that Pakistan would make all-out efforts for a “peaceful, stable and united Afghanistan”.

Kayani maintained that the release of Taliban detainees was part of Pakistan’s ‘sincere efforts’ to help the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process.

He also assured the Afghan delegation of full support to bring normalcy to the border region, which “should have a direct and positive effect on the stability in Afghanistan so that situation could become ripe for the drawdown of Isaf forces in 2014”.

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

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