



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

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1. IRAQ

- **Kanna describes inviting UN to mediate among dispute sides in Iraq as "positive step" (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Yunadim Kanna stressed that "Inviting the United Nations to mediate among the dispute political sides in Iraq came due to the absence of the President Jalal Talabani from the political arena, besides the lack of a neutral figure that enjoys acceptability among all."

Kanna told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "Talabani played role in preserving the Constitution and taking the initiative to calm down the tensions and resolve crises, but now, there is no figure that enjoys acceptability for all like Talabani."

"For this reason, we invited the UN to mediate among the dispute sides in Iraq as the country lacks neutral figure. Moreover, it is still under the UN sanctions stated in UN Charter's Seventh Chapter," he added.

The UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Iraq, Martin Kobler, has

visited Mosul on last Tuesday to check on the demonstration's situation there.

- **Iraq National Defense Council stresses need to protect protesters (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

The National Defence Council of Iraq has issued a statement, following the conclusion of a meeting headed by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and attended by Deputy Prime Minister Ruz Nuri Shaways, Acting Defence Minister Sa'dun al-Dulaymi, Senior Interior Ministry Undersecretary Adnan al-Asadi, and a number of security prominent officials.

The statement stressed the need to provide protestors with protection as a constitutional right, and thwart the attempts of terrorist organizations and those of bad intentions who want to exploit protests to serve their aggressive plans and political and foreign agendas through inciting protestors to confront security forces which might lead to unlikable results.

The statement called on the Iraqi people, especially the protestors, to thwart the terrorists' plans, stand in the face of the

infiltrators of these protests, stress the unity of the homeland and all the ranks of the Iraqi people, and commit to peaceful protests and the law.

The statement called on the security forces to maintain vigilance and caution, and to strictly face all suspicious attempts by anyone who intends to damage public properties and infrastructure sites, or attack security elements, in addition to committing to the provisions of the constitution and the law.

- **Maliki holds extended meeting with all security leaders of provinces (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Office of the General Commander of Armed Forces announced that the General Commander, Nouri al-Maliki, will hold an extended security meeting attended by all the security leaders of the provinces.

A statement by the Office received by AIN cited "The meeting tackled the security situation in general and the events in some provinces," noting that "During the meeting, the adherence of the Iraqi Government and the Armed Forces to deal

positively with the demonstrations and the demonstrators was highlighted."

"The meeting resulted in calling the security forces to be cautious concerning some sides that want to deviate the demonstrations from its normal path and warned those who sabotage the general properties," the statement concluded.

- **Names of Fallujah culprits to be announced next week, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

30 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc MP stated here today that the parliamentary committee on Fallujah incidents will announce next week the names of the culprits from both the army and the demonstrators who used arms.

MP Hussein al-Hamdani, in a press statement, said the details of the incident will be announced.

The committee said, in its 48 hour report, recommended removal of the army and the federal police from the cities.

The public protection shall be entrusted to local police, as the reports added.

It condemned the attacks against the army and the demonstrators, alike, as the statement continued.

The investigations proved that some intruders burnt the vehicle of Provincial Council's Chairman.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28v2atp_yf52b2kfaylg2u5sral%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152313&l=1

- **Wardi: Withdrawal of IS MPs, Ministers depends on responding to demonstrators' demands (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Liqa Wardi, of the Iraqiya Slate, assured that the withdrawal of the MPs and the ministers of the IS depends on responding to the demonstrators' demands by the political blocs such as the State of Law Coalition.

Speaking to All Iraq News Agency (AIN), she said "The IS could not convey the demonstrators' demands through endorsing the important laws to reduce the public tension," noting that "As being politicians, we will have another decision

by withdrawing from the political process and calling to dismiss the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki in addition to conducting early elections."

"The laws that are for the interests of the public are hindered by the SLC in the parliament," she concluded.

The Ministers of the IS announced after the Slate's meeting at the residence of the Deputy Premier, Salih al-Mutleg, on last Monday that they will boycott the session of the Council of Ministers to protest putting off the demonstrators' demands.

- **Anbar protestors: Withdrawing Abu Risha's protection force intends harming protestors, Anbar people (NINA)**

30 Jan 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Coordination committees of Anbar protest denounced the Prime Minister's decision to withdraw the military protection force of the Head of Iraq Sahwa Council, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, describing the decision of being wrongful, intends to attack protectors and demonstrators, as well as citizens of Anbar.

Member of the Coordination Committee told NINA on Wednesday, Jan. 30, that, "Maliki's decision to withdraw Sheikh Abu Risha protection force is a clear intention to harm demonstrators and protestors, especially that Sheikh Abu Risha is one of the leaders of the province's protests and demonstrations and a national figure that participated in expelling Qaeda organization from Anbar."

Earlier in the day, the Anbar Tribes' Council announced that the Central Government has withdrawn the military protection force assigned to Sheikh Abu Risha, Head of Iraq Sahwa Conference, and disarm it.

- **Fayadh underestimates number of western provinces' demonstrators (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Ali al-Fayadh of the State of Law Coalition underestimated the number of the demonstrators in the western provinces.

Fayadh told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The people who participated in the protests of the western provinces are only

some thousands where are millions are away from the protest squares."

He confirmed "The political process in Iraq is polluted with some figures who basically do not believe in the political process they are behind the problems that affect the political process."

"The upcoming phase will witness improvement for favor of Iraq and extension of confidence bridges among the people communities based on public interest and elimination of conspiracies being interwoven against Iraq's unity," Fayadh concluded.

- **Lack of political consensus behind procrastinating [on] demonstrators' demands, says MP (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Secretary General of the Correction Movement associated to the Iraqiya Slate, MP Kamil al-Dulaimi, assured that "The lack of political agreement led to procrastinating the demonstrators' demands."

Dulaimi stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The absence of political consensus

resulted for procrastinating the demands of the demonstrators."

He added "We need to search for effective solutions for the crises through dialogue whether at the Parliament or at the Council of Ministers, as all bear responsibly for what is going on in Iraq."

- **Religious reference al-Ha'iri calls for unity, cooperating with security forces (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

Religious reference Grand Ayatollah Kazim al-Ha'iri has stressed that the developments taking place in Iraq represent a colonial plan that aims to ignite sectarian conflict and disperse the positions of Sunnis and Shi'is, in order to make way for the disbelief powers and the supporters of sedition.

Al-Ha'iri called for defeating these plans and conspiracies through unity, eliminating conflicts, and cooperating with security forces. Al-Ha'iri called, in a statement, on the government officials to immediately respond to the legitimate demands of the people and to refrain from approving illegitimate demands at the expense of the interests of oppressed people. Al-Ha'iri called for punishing

murderers and terrorists who are involved in the bloodshed of innocent people."

- **Hakim calls on Iraqiya Slate to reconsider boycotting parliament (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, called the Iraqiya Slate to reconsider its decision of boycotting the Parliament regular sessions, demanding the Government to quickly meet the legitimate demonstrators' demands.

During a ceremony to celebrate Prophet Mohamed's birth, Hakim said "Preserving the unity and exercising restraint is very crucial whatever the circumstances are," noting that "The SIIC supports the call for legitimate demands, but these demands must be harmonious with the constitution and the law."

Hakim called on "The demonstrators to prevent penetrating the protests by corrupted people who ask for unreasonable demands that do not conform with the constitution."

He continued saying "The Iraqi army holds big responsibility in protecting the country and the people, therefore it should be kept away from the politicization and the political disputes."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27587

- **Resignation of Iraqi Government impossible, says Mansouri (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Hussein al-Mansouri of the Ahrar bloc within the Sadr Trend confirmed that "The resignation of the Iraqi Government is impossible, calling it to correct its path to resolve the accumulated crises."

Mansouri told All Iraq News Agency "Non-meeting demonstrators' demands is serious matter in a democratic state," noting that "Some of the demands of Anbar, Nineveh, and Salah il-Din demonstrators are legitimate whereas some others are illegitimate and cannot be achieved such as canceling the Anti-Terrorism Law's article 4 and the Accountability & Justice Law."

"Hence, the Government has to correct its defects as its resignation is something impossible," he concluded.

- **Jaafary: National Gathering to hold its meeting to discuss INA's suggestions (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The head of the Iraqi National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jaafary, announced that the National Gathering to discuss the suggestions submitted by the INA to make the amendments on the disputed laws.

A statement by Jaafary's office received by AIN "Jaafary received the US Ambassador to Iraq, Steven Beecroft, at his office in Baghdad where they discussed the current political crisis and the results of the talks among the political sides."

"Jaafary assured that the crisis can be settled due to the seriousness and the cooperation of all the political blocs and submitting the concessions," the statement added.

It is worth mentioning that the National Gathering, formed by the INA, has held

two meetings chaired by Jaafari where it discussed the procedures of the ministerial committee regarding the prisoners and the demonstrators' demands.

<http://www.alliraqnews.com>

- **National Forum to discuss amendment of Amnesty and Questioning Laws, Jaffari (Aswat al-Iraq)**

30 Jan 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Chairman of the Iraqi National Alliance Ibrahim al-Jaffari discussed today with the US ambassador Stephen Beecroft means to contain the current crisis and the results of the discussions of political components.

In a statement by his office, Jaffari disclosed that the National Forum will hold its third meeting to discuss views presented by the National Alliance for the amendments to be taken on General Amnesty and Questioning and Justice Laws, as well as Article 4 of terrorism.

Jaffari confirmed that "the crisis could be solved in the light of seriousness and cooperation of all components".

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

- **Parliament to dismiss Youth Minister if [he] declines to attend investigation session (alliraqnews)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Mohamed Ridha al-Khafaji of the Ahrar bloc associated to the Sadr Trend stressed that "The MPs agreed on dismissing or withdrawing confidence from the Minister of Youth and Sports in case he will not attend the investigation session at the Parliament."

Khafaji stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The Constitution is based on respecting all the constitutional institutions in the country where the Parliament is the highest state constitutional institution."

"The investigation is a democratic process," he added arguing "The investigated official does not fear of

investigation unless there is indication for his involvement in corruption cases."

- **Bulani: Concentrating on provincial elections reduces problems of Federal Government (NINA)**

30 Jan 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of Badana Trend, former Interior Minister, Jawad al-Bulani, said that concentrating on Provincial Councils Election will produce strong local governments that reduce problems of the Federal Government.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Jan. 30, Bulani said, "concentrating on provincial councils election and urging electors go to voting polls will become a start for change in the provinces' local governments up to Parliamentary election due to be held next year.

Bulani stressed that forming strong provincial governments reduces problems of the Federal Government, giving it space for domestic and international political work.

The Provincial Councils' election due to be held on April 20, in which 139 political entities are competing.

- **Russia, Iraq discuss bilateral cooperation (Trend News)**

30 Jan 2013

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed bilateral cooperation between Russia and Iraq with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki via telephone, RIA Novosti reported with reference to the Kremlin's press service.

"The two sides exchanged views on topical issues of bilateral cooperation. In particular, the sides stressed the importance of implementing agreements reached during Nouri al-Maliki's visit to Russia in October 2012," the press-release said.

During his visit to Moscow in October, al-Maliki signed a package agreement on military-technical cooperation worth \$4.2 billion. Later in October, the head of Iraqi Cabinet agreed with Czech authorities to purchase 28 L-159 combat training airplanes worth one billion dollars. Later, a number of Iraqi government officials made contradictory statements regarding this deal. Al-Maliki's spokesman said the deal was terminated due to corruption, whereas Defense Minister Sadun al-Dulaymi refuted this information.

<http://en.trend.az/regions/met/iraq/2113845.html>

2. IRAN

- **Israel cannot destroy Iran nuclear program: Netanyahu**

TEHRAN, Jan. 31 (MNA) –Israel’s Prime Minister says the country cannot destroy Iran’s nuclear program.

Benjamin Netanyahu hinted that Israel could not destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities fully. He added that Israel would seek help from US to ‘fully demolish’ Tehran’s nuclear ‘drive.’

Israeli daily Times reported that in his speech before the board of the American Jewish Committee, Netanyahu said; “To be a credible threat, you have to mean it,” and “That is, if the sanctions are not effective, and they are not so far, you will use it.”

“This is a specific task that the US is able to do perfectly, and we are able to cause significant damage,” Netanyahu said, adding that 2013 was the “year of decision” because of Iran’s continuing

efforts to acquire enough highly-enriched uranium to make a nuclear bomb, despite sanctions.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1804626>

- **Supreme Leader’s advisor meets Pakistani president**

TEHRAN, Jan. 31 (MNA) – Ali Akbar Velayati, the senior foreign policy advisor to the Supreme Leader, arrived in Islamabad on Wednesday and met with President Asif Ali Zardari.

The Pakistani president highlighted the importance of ties with Tehran and said his country is firm to expand relations with Iran in all areas.

He also said the completion of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project is high on the agenda of his government.

Zardari also announced he would make a visit to Tehran in the near future, saying he hopes to meet the Supreme Leader during his trip.

The president also said Pakistan plans to increase imports of electricity from Iran to 1000 megawatts and even more.

Velayati also met with Pakistani Senate Chairman Syed Nayyar Hussain Bukhari.

Bukhari described relations between the two countries as strategic and emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation in order to boost regional stability.

Velayati is scheduled to meet with a number of Pakistani Shia and Sunni religious scholars in the next few days as well.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1804599>

- **Iran crude oil exports rise to highest since EU sanctions**

TEHRAN, Jan. 31 (MNA) – Iran's crude oil exports in December leapt to their highest level since European Union sanctions took effect last July, analysts and shipping sources said, as strong Chinese demand and tanker fleet expansion helped the OPEC member dodge sanctions.

Exports rose to around 1.4 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, according to two industry sources and shipping and customs data compiled by Reuters on a country-by-country basis and corroborated by other sources and consultants.

Western sanctions aimed at curbing Iran's disputed nuclear program halved Iran's oil exports in 2012 from 2.2 million bpd in late 2011.

But continuous robust demand from top buyer China and others such as India and Japan, as well as the purchase of new tankers, allowed the Islamic Republic to unexpectedly boost exports late last year.

Salar Moradi, oil market analyst at oil and gas consultancy FGE, estimated that Iran shipped more than 1.4 million bpd of crude oil in December and forecast that exports would remain between 1.1-1.3 million bpd in the first quarter of 2013.

This represents an increase from a low-point of less than 900,000 bpd in September and suggests monthly revenues worth approximately \$4.7 billion based on December Brent prices.

"They (Iran) bought a number of tankers from China and can now do more deliveries ... It's taken some pressure off Iran and facilitated tanker traffic and we are seeing higher exports to China," he told Reuters this week.

The second industry source said the rise in exports to near 1.4 million bpd was a result of traditional buyers finding new ways to secure shipping insurance.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1804597>

- **Iran ready to help reform current global situation: Ahmadinejad**

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (R) and Omani Foreign Minister Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah (L) meet in the Iranian capital, Tehran, January 30, 2013.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (R) and Omani Foreign Minister Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah (L) meet in the Iranian capital, Tehran, January 30, 2013. Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili (R) and Omani Foreign Minister Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah (L) meet in the Iranian capital, Tehran, January 30, 2013.

If justice and respect are observed in all developments in the world, all sides will benefit, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready for participation and all-out cooperation in the process of rectifying the ongoing situation in favor of humanity."

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has stressed the importance of observing justice and respect in all international issues, expressing the Islamic Republic's readiness for all-out cooperation to reform the current global situation.



"If justice and respect are observed in all developments in the world, all sides will benefit, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready for participation and all-out cooperation in the process of rectifying the ongoing situation in favor of humanity," President Ahmadinejad said in a meeting with Omani Foreign Minister

Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah in Tehran on Wednesday.

He warned that only the enemies of humanity benefit from the current situation in the region and called for collective cooperation to promote progress, welfare and security.

The Iranian chief executive praised the amicable, deep-rooted and broad relations between Iran and Oman and urged the further expansion of the two countries' bilateral cooperation in various regional and international fields.

Enhanced relations between Iran and Oman will be beneficial to the two nations and regional states, Ahmadinejad pointed out.

The Omani foreign minister, for his part, described as "positive and constructive" the cooperation between Tehran and Muscat and hailed Iran's resistance against conditions imposed by hegemonic powers.

Meanwhile, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili also

met with the Omani foreign minister on Wednesday.

During the meeting, Jalili called on the two countries to make use of their strategic potential to strengthen political, economic and cultural cooperation.

The Omani minister, for his part, urged Tehran and Muscat to enhance their bilateral cooperation.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/31/286501/iran-ready-to-rectify-global-situation/>

- **Iran oil industry unfazed by sanctions: Minister**

Iran Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi says the country is not concerned about the impact of Western sanctions on the development of its oil industry.

"In recent years, with the good support from the government, suitable investments have been made in the [Iranian oil] industry," Qasemi said on Wednesday.

The minister stated that Iran has successfully passed through the hardest

phase of the Western sanctions against its energy sector.



He added that Iran has become self-sufficient in the production and manufacturing of equipment used in the oil industry, which allay concerns about this sector.

On January 13, Managing-Director of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Abdolhossein Bayat said Iranian experts have mastered the technological know-how and achieved the licensing required to manufacture 38 petrochemical products.

These achievements come against a background of illegal US-engineered sanctions imposed on Iran's energy and banking sectors by Western countries.

At the beginning of 2012, the United States and the European Union imposed new sanctions on Iran's oil and financial

sectors with the goal of preventing other countries from purchasing Iranian oil and conducting transactions with the Central Bank of Iran.

The sanctions came into force in early summer 2012.

On October 15, 2012, the EU foreign ministers reached an agreement on another round of sanctions against Iran.

The illegal US-engineered sanctions have been imposed based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/30/286419/iran-oil-industry-unfazed-by-sanctions/>

- **IRGC kicks off Fath 91 military drills in Persian Gulf**



The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has started three-day military drills in the Persian Gulf waters in southern Iran to exercise rapid deployment of its forces in case of crisis.

The maritime drills, codenamed Fath (Victory) 91, aims to assess the combat readiness of the IRGC Marines as well as air defense, naval patrol, missile and vessel units, IRGC Navy commander Rear Admiral Seifollah Bakhtiarvand said Wednesday.

“After the end of [1980s Iraqi imposed] war, the IRGC strengthened itself and designed its defense projects based on the worst case scenarios,” the commander said.

In December 2012, Iran’s Navy held six-day naval maneuvers in order to display the country’s capabilities to defend its maritime borders and maintain lasting peace in the region.

The drills covered a vast area including the Strait of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman, north of the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden, and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defensive capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, insisting that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/30/286410/irgc-kicks-off-fath-91-in-persian-gulf/>

- **Iran gas to reach Iraq next summer: Oil Ministry official**

Iran Oil Ministry spokesman says the country will start exporting natural gas to Baghdad by next summer via an under-construction pipeline between the two countries.

Alireza Nikzad-Rahbar said on Wednesday that the "friendship" pipeline project between Iran, Iraq and Syria, is the most important project currently pursued by the ministry.

The official said if the project is carried out according to schedule, the gas pipeline between Iran and Iraq will be completed next summer, adding that tripartite talks are underway to extend the pipeline to Syria.

He noted that the pipeline would be designed in such a way that it would be able to deliver gas to other Muslim countries like Jordan and Lebanon in the future.



The 56-inch pipeline will start from Assaluyeh, near South Pars Gas Field in southern Iran, and will continue into the neighboring Iraq to feed three Iraqi power plants running on gas.

The South Pars Gas Field, which is shared with Qatar, holds about 14 trillion cubic meters of gas, or about eight percent of the total world reserves, and more than 18 billion barrels of liquefied natural gas resources.

Iran, which sits on the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia, is making efforts to up its gas production by increasing foreign and domestic investments, especially in South Pars Gas Field.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/30/286408/iran-gas-to-reach-iraq-next-summer/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Hamas denies recognizing two-state solution**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Hamas on Wednesday said it does not accept the two-state solution, following reports the party had changed its position to accept the state of Israel.



The Saudi newspaper Al-Sharq reported Wednesday that Hamas politburo chief Khalid Mashaal asked Jordan's King Abdullah to inform US President Barack Obama that Hamas accepted the two-state solution.

Hamas said in a statement that the report was baseless and that Mashaal did not address the two-state solution in his meeting with the Jordanian king in Amman on Monday.

Senior Hamas official Yahya Moussa also denied the report and said recognizing the two-state solution would indicate acceptance of Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Hamas will not change its position, Moussa told Ma'an.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560770>

- **EU, UN concerned by Israeli live fire against Palestinians**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The European Union and the United Nations expressed concern on Wednesday about Israel's use of lethal forces against Palestinians following a rise in fatal shootings.



The EU missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah said in a statement that they were "deeply concerned by the number of Palestinians killed recently."

The EU noted that Israeli authorities were investigating the deaths and called for restraint "except in cases where there is a real and imminent threat to life."

Meanwhile, UN humanitarian coordinator James W. Rawley also expressed concern at the rise in casualties resulting from live fire by Israeli forces in the West Bank.

"Eight Palestinian civilians, including three minors and one woman, have been killed since mid-November in separate incidents in the West Bank," a statement from his office said.

"Using live ammunition against civilians may constitute excessive use of force and any such occurrences should be investigated in a timely, thorough, independent and impartial manner. Individuals found responsible must be held accountable," the statement added.

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.

At least five Palestinians have been fatally shot by Israeli forces in January. Israel's army denied responsibility for the death of a sixth man shot dead along the Gaza border.

A report published Monday by Israeli rights group B'Tselem said that Israel's army "extensively and systematically violated" rules barring deadly retaliation for non-lethal assault.

"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.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560688>

- **Elections commission sets date to update Gaza voter registry**

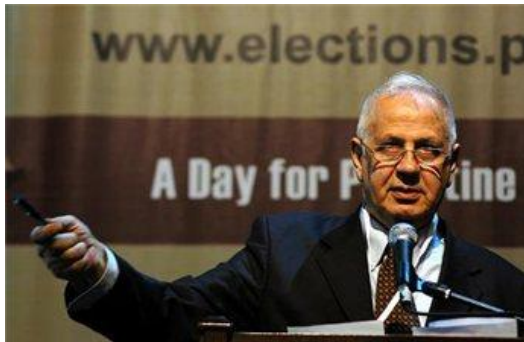
GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- The Central Elections Commission will start updating the voter registry in Gaza on Feb. 11, a Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine official said Wednesday.

Palestinian factions met with the electoral body in Gaza City on Wednesday.

DFLP official Abdul-Hamid Abu Habbab told Ma'an that factions agreed the commission would update the electoral

roll in 254 centers in Gaza over one week, starting Feb. 11

He said around 350,000 eligible voters were not registered. The roll has not been updated in Gaza since Jan. 2005.



A media campaign will be launched to encourage voter registration, Abu Habbab said. "We hope this step will pave the way to presidential and parliamentary elections," he added.

Earlier Wednesday, commission chief Hanna Nasser met with Gaza premier Ismail Haniyeh.

Nasser told reporters at a news conference that most obstacles to preparing for elections had been resolved.

Gaza government spokesman Taher al-Nunu said the ministries of interior and education had been instructed to

cooperate with the CEC and facilitate its work.

Once the voter registry is updated, the CEC will prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections and a vote for the PLO's Palestinian National Council, al-Nunu said.

In July 2012, Hamas suspended the CEC's work a day before it was due to begin registering voters in Gaza, citing the continued arrest of Hamas members in the West Bank and its questions over the commission's impartiality.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560723>

- **Settlers Starts Building Settlement Outpost near Qalqilia**

QALQILIA, January 29, 2013 (Wafa) – Settlers Tuesday began building a settlement outpost on the land of the village of Jayyous, near the city of Qalqilia, said local sources.

Head of Jayyous Village Council Ghassan Harami told Wafa that a number of settlers and under the protection of the

Israeli army put up seven caravans on land that belongs to a Palestinian family.

He said that army vehicles razed the land in the area and connected the caravans with electricity in preparation for the settlers to reside there.

The separation wall, constructed on the land of Jayyous in 2002, confiscated over 8600 dunums of land that belongs to the residents of the village, depriving them their primer source of living.

They filed a lawsuit to amend the separation wall's path and regained about 6200 dunums of land, which didn't go well with the settlers, who put up the caravans in response.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21581>

- **Rights Groups Say Israel Must Submit Review Report to UN**

RAMALLAH, January 29, 2013 (Wafa) – Fourteen Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations demanded Tuesday that Israel must submit its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to the United

Nations Human Rights Council, according to a press statement.

The groups warned of the far-reaching consequences of Israel's refusal to fully cooperate with the United Nations as it remains unclear whether it intends to participate.

"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," said the statement distributed by Addameer, a Ramallah-based Palestinian human rights organization.

In May 2012, Israel formally announced its decision to suspend its contact with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights Council and its subsequent mechanisms.

Israel reportedly met with the Council President Remigiusz A. Henczel in January 2013 and discussed a postponement of its UPR. However, as no formal request has yet been made, the Council agreed to

proceed as scheduled and to consider on the day the UPR is supposed to be submitted, scheduled for Tuesday, what steps to take if the Israeli delegation does not attend.

“These exceptional circumstances have created uncertainty and forced some civil society organizations to revise or limit their engagement with the review process due to the risk of investing necessarily significant resources into a process that may not take place,” said the statement. “Thus, a key component of the UPR process – civil society engagement – has been severely hampered.”

The rights groups warned that through this uncertainty, Israel and the Council are setting a dangerous precedent on the international stage, one that could be followed by other States refusing to engage with the UN in order to avoid critical appraisals.

“Israel’s decision to disengage from core mechanisms of the United Nations human rights system has, in effect, resulted in preferential treatment,” they said. “Israel should not receive any benefits or concessions for its efforts to undermine

the system of the UN and, in particular, its human rights system.”

To the contrary, added the statement, “the Council should ensure the unobstructed process of Israel’s UPR in accordance with the principles and standards set in the UPR mechanism, thereby reasserting the condition that human rights are more important than political or diplomatic considerations.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21579>

- **US officials: Israel notified us of intention to hit Syria**

Wall Street Journal quotes official as saying strike targeted convoy of trucks carrying Russian-made missiles to Hezbollah.

American officials have told the New York Times that Jerusalem had given the US advance warning of an Israeli air strike at dawn on Tuesday on a convoy carrying weapons in Syria, close to the Lebanese border.

American officials said overnight Wednesday that the strike had targeted a

suspected shipment of anti-aircraft missiles, the Wall Street Journal and Times reported.

Wednesday's strike on the the convoy, which has not been officially confirmed by Israel, came after hours of what Lebanese army sources described as repeated invasions of its airspace by Israeli warplanes. Syria's military command on Wednesday night denied that a convoy had been attacked, saying that a military research facility had been the target. The White House and the Israel Defense Forces have declined to comment.

The Wall Street Journal report cites a Western official as saying that the strike targeted a convoy of trucks carrying Russian-made SA-17 anti-aircraft missile launchers to Hezbollah, in a border area west of Damascus. Hezbollah acquisition of such missiles could hinder Israel's ability to maneuver freely over Lebanon for surveillance or target Hezbollah targets in any future conflict. Other foreign reports on the strike also said a weapons convoy carrying "game-changing" arms from Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon had been hit. Reuters cited one Western

diplomat as saying that the target was "a truck loaded with weapons, heading from Syria to Lebanon," adding that the consignment seemed unlikely to have included chemical weapons.

Other reports suggested that the weapons hit were Yakhont anti-ship missiles or powerful Scud D surface-to-surface missiles. There was no word on whether the convoy carried chemical weapons.



Foreign reports are also conflicted over the location of the strike. Most say the air strike took place near the Syrian town of Zabadani, in the southwest of the country near the Lebanese border, while others said the attack occurred just after the convoy entered Lebanon, near the village of Nabi Sheeth.

Syrian state television said that Israel Air Force fighter jets struck a "military research center" in the Damascus

province, near the border with Lebanon, at dawn on Wednesday. Two people were reported killed and five wounded in the attack on the site in Jamraya, which the television described as one of several “scientific research centers aimed at raising the level of resistance and self-defense.” The building was destroyed, the Syrian military command said in a statement carried by state media. It said planes flying below radar crossed into Syria just north of Mount Hermon, and returned on the same route.

Lebanese sources reported the entry of 12 Israel Air Force jets in waves on Tuesday afternoon and evening. The fighter planes flew over the southwestern Lebanese town of Nakoura, then headed northeast over Bint Jbail toward the Syrian border, according to the reports. At 2 a.m., the jets were reportedly heard heading back to Israel.

A source among the rebels fighting the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad said an air strike at around dawn blasted a convoy on a mountain track about 5 kilometers south of where the main Damascus-Beirut highway crosses the border.

“It attacked trucks carrying sophisticated weapons from the regime to Hezbollah,” the source said, adding that it took place inside Syria, though the border in the area is poorly defined.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=301606>

- **Peres meets with factions over formulation of gov't**

As President Shimon Peres began the process of discussing with political parties whom to appoint to form the next government, parties recommending Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu began to discuss which ministries they want.

Likud Beytenu and Yesh Atid, the two largest lists with 31 and 19 seats in the 19th Knesset, respectively, recommended Netanyahu to Peres, as 30 more MKs from Bayit Yehudi, Shas and United Torah Judaism are expected to do on Thursday.

Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar, who headed the joint Likud Beytenu delegation that met with Peres, recommended that he call on Netanyahu to assemble the next

government because Likud Beytenu received more votes than any other list.

“It is clear that only one man, Binyamin Netanyahu, can form a government, and we want that government to be as broad and stable as possible,” Sa’ar said.

“We want a coalition as wide and as stable as possible to meet the challenges ahead,” Environmental Protection Minister Gilad Erdan said before meeting with Peres together with fellow Likud Beytenu ministers and MKs – Sa’ar, Yuval Steinitz, Ze’ev Elkin, Robert Ilatov and David Rotem.

Matters that were raised in discussion between the president and the delegation included the incoming government’s political platform, Iran, the economy, the budget, and equalizing the burden of national service.

The Yesh Atid party delegation, led by Yair Lapid, spent more time with Peres than Likud Beytenu did, and recommended Netanyahu.

Lapid said that in the past, parties would negotiate and debate over whom they

would recommend to the president, but he told Peres that it was part of the Yesh Atid platform that the largest party should form the next government.

The Yesh Atid chairman reiterated other aspects of the platform, such as eliminating ministers without portfolio, that everyone should play their part in service to the state and that negotiations in the peace process should resume.

After his speech, in an unprecedented move, Lapid went back to the President’s Residence and dined with Peres for more than an hour.

Sources in Yesh Atid said that, in addition to either the Finance or Foreign portfolio for Lapid, they would ask for the Construction and Housing Ministry, and for the Education Ministry for Rabbi Shai Piron, who is second on the Yesh Atid list.

In addition, Yesh Atid plans to demand the chairmanship of the Knesset Finance Committee, the conduit through which all government spending decisions must pass.

The committee is one of the most important in the Knesset, together with Foreign Affairs and Defense, and is often led by a UTJ MK, most recently Moshe Gafni.

A Yesh Atid source explained that if the Finance Committee had a haredi chairman, he would have the power to block reforms the new government wishes to instate.

A senior UTJ source responded to the rumors, saying he doubted it would happen, because Yesh Atid would receive several ministries.

“Since we don’t take ministerial positions [for ideological reasons], we ask for deputy ministerial posts and chairmanship of important Knesset committees.

Other than the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the most important is the Finance Committee, which is especially important regarding the allocation of budgets,” the source explained.



UTJ plans to ask for the deputy health minister and deputy education minister positions, which it held in the last Knesset.

Shas repeated on Wednesday that ministerial demands were not a condition for it entering the government, and a party source added that there had not yet been serious discussions on portfolios.

Rather, Shas is working on the principles for joint coalition negotiations with UTJ.

Meanwhile, Bayit Yehudi has a long list of ministries it would accept. Foremost in its demands are either Interior or Justice, which are in the second tier of prestigious ministries after the sought-after Defense, Foreign and Finance portfolios.

“Bayit Yehudi should be able to get one of them as the second- largest coalition partner,” a party source said. “We prefer the Justice Ministry – especially for Uri

Ariel, [second on the list], since he talked about it throughout the campaign.”

The party also plans to ask for the Construction and Housing Ministry, though the source admitted competition was tight, with Likud Beytenu and Yesh Atid asking for the portfolio, as well as Education and Religious Services, which the latter is also likely to demand.

“Lapid can’t take the Foreign Ministry and Housing and Education.

He can’t have all the senior portfolios. He’ll have to learn to be flexible,” the Bayit Yehudi source added.

Bayit Yehudi is facing internal fighting over who will be appointed minister. Depending on the final coalition agreement, the party is expected to get three or four portfolios, the first two of which will go to party chairman Naftali Bennett and Ariel.

Avi Wortzman, eighth on the Bayit Yehudi list, announced at a meeting of all the party’s MKs that he should be a minister, because of his experience as deputy mayor of Beersheba, but others in the

party prefer former and incoming MK Nissan Slomianksy or current MK Uri Orbach.

The 10 other parties in the 19th Knesset will meet with Peres on Thursday.

Labor, Meretz, Hadash, United Arab List-Ta’al and Balad are not expected to recommend anyone, while Kadima plans to recommend Netanyahu.

The Tzipi Livni Party had not yet reached a decision on Wednesday afternoon, and is unlikely to recommend Netanyahu.

On Wednesday evening, Peres said an election campaign in its style and content was a lesson in national democracy, after receiving the official results of the elections for the 19th Knesset from Central Elections Committee chairman Justice Elyakim Rubinstein.

Peres said that now that he had the official results, he could begin consultations with the political parties and hear their recommendations for prime minister.

He hoped that the person whom he tasks with forming a government will agree to take the challenge. Peres explained that the law stipulated that he must enter into consultations with the parties before making his decision.

"I am fully aware of my responsibilities in this regard," he said. "This is a very heavy responsibility and I intend to carry it out in full accordance with the law to facilitate a government that represents the will of the people. I see this as both a duty and a privilege."

Rubinstein said he was very pleased with the campaign that had been conducted to urge the public to exercise its right to vote, and although the turnout did not reach the 70 percent it targeted, 68 percent was certainly a sign of progress.

Rubinstein regretted that during the election campaign there had been certain incidents of racism that he termed a red warning sign.

"There is no room for racism in Israel, which became a sovereign state after the Holocaust," he said.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=301558>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Salafist Nour Party, NSF call for unity government**

Salafist Nour Party and National Salvation Front (NSF) announce 8-point plan to end Egypt's political crisis

Egypt's National Salvation Front (NSF), the main opposition bloc, and the Salafist Nour Party agreed on a unified initiative that aims to end Egypt's ongoing political crisis, following a meeting held in Cairo on Wednesday.

The initiative includes eight terms, in which the main condition is to form a unity government that includes the representation of opposition groups.

"The agreement comes, as both sides (NSF and Nour Party) see that Egypt's political situation has escalated to an alarming level, as the initiative's goal is to protect the public interest and end future bloodshed," explained the press statement issued after the meeting.



The eight-points of the agreement that came in the press statement are:

Point 1: Form a unity government

Point 2: Form a committee to amend controversial articles in the constitution

Point 3: Non-partisanship of all state institutions

Point 4: Appointment of a new prosecutor-general

Point 5: Form a judicial committee to investigate recent violence

Point 6: Form a consensus between all parties to lead the country, prohibiting the domination of a single faction over political life

Point 7: Reject all forms of violence or vandalism of public property, and respect

the right to peaceful protest and demonstrations

Point 8: Establish a code of political behaviour agreed upon by all parties to end the verbal warfare between politicians that affects everyone's political image.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/63689/Egypt/Politics-/Salafist-Nour-Party,-NSF-call-for-unity-government.aspx>

- **Egypt's National Salvation Front rejects dialogue with Morsi**

National Salvation Front (NSF) to issue shortlist of 'pre-conditions' for national dialogue with presidency aimed at resolving Egypt's political crisis

Egyptian reform leader Mohammed El Baradei, center, speaks during a press conference following the meeting of the National Salvation Front, as former Egyptian presidential candidate, Hamdeen Sabahi, left, and former Egyptian Foreign Minister and presidential candidate, Amr Moussa, right, listen in Cairo, Egypt, Monday, Jan. 28, 2013 (Photo: AP)

Egypt's National Salvation Front (NSF), a coalition of opposition parties and groups, rejected on Monday an invitation by President Mohamed Morsi to hold talks aimed at resolving the current political crisis.

At a press conference held at Wafd Party headquarters in Cairo, the NSF – in a statement read out by NSF co-founder and Constitution Party chief Mohamed ElBaradei – rejected Morsi's proposed dialogue as a "facade" and stressed that certain conditions needed to be met in order to guarantee a "serious dialogue".



"We are not against holding talks, but we will not let the Egyptian people down by engaging in fake dialogue," ElBaradei said.

"Many missteps have led to the current situation...security measures will not solve the current crisis, but a political solution must be found," he added.

NSF members who attended the conference – including former presidential candidates Hamdeen Sabbahi and Amr Moussa, along with Wafd Party chief El-Sayed El-Badawi – said they would soon unveil their "conditions" for dialogue.

The NSF had earlier proposed five demands that it said were necessary for national consensus.

"We met with Morsi earlier, and all we got from the meeting was a dictatorial constitutional declaration," said Sabbahi. "The second dialogue meeting did not accomplish anything either."

Sabbahi went on to demand that the president "acknowledge his responsibility" for the bloodshed, admit the legitimacy of the "people's demands" and respect peaceful protests. He further demanded that interior ministry and security officials be prosecuted for using excessive force to disperse recent demonstrations.

The opposition front also stressed its commitment to the revolution, saying it would "engage in any actions that would lead to the realisation of revolutionary goals". It went on to claim that it would

only employ peaceful methods and condemned all forms of vandalism and violence.

NSF leaders also denied they had plans to form a "presidential council."

The NSF also stressed its solidarity with the people of Port Said, Ismailia and Suez, adding that they would not tolerate the "isolation" of the three canal cities.

Clashes have been ongoing between police and protesters in the three cities since Friday, which marked the second anniversary of Egypt's January 25 Revolution. More than 40 people have been reported killed in the violence.

The death toll rose dramatically in Port Said when a court on Saturday sentenced 21 Port Said residents to death for their involvement in last February's Port Said stadium disaster, in which scores of football fans were killed. Since then, the city has witnessed intense rioting, with residents accusing the central government of scapegoating and marginalising them.

Intermittent clashes remain ongoing in Cairo, Damanshour and Alexandria. The

nationwide death toll is now estimated at more than 50 with hundreds more injured. At least 296 protesters have been arrested since Friday, according to security sources.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/63493/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-National-Salvation-Front-rejects-dialogue-w.aspx>

- **Tunisia to secure Sufi shrines**

Tunisian salafists torched the Gafsa mausoleum of Sidi Ben Naji and the mausoleum of Sidi Baghdadi in Monastir on Sunday (January 27th).

The attacks came a day after Culture Minister Mehdi Mabrouk said that an urgent security plan would be drawn up to put an end to the desecration of Sufi shrines.

Protecting the shrines "has become an urgent matter after we found out that there is systematic plan by some religious extremist groups to completely destroy these historical symbols; something that indicates an intention to target our national memory," the minister said.

"There must be a firm stance to counter this challenge," Mabrouk added. "We demand that a security unit be assigned to protect the Sufi brotherhoods, shrines and mausoleums, which represent an integral part to our national memory," he added.

Sufi union chief Mohamed El Heni welcomed the government's decision, but at the same time criticised the government's failure to investigate crimes committed against many Sufi holy sites, which still represent a religious and cultural dimension of the country.

He added that more than 34 shrines have been attacked in eight months, and said this shows that there is a deliberate plan by extremist religious movements. He added that radicals want to sow strife and desecrate the mosques, brotherhoods and shrines of renowned sheiks in the name of Islam.

"It's good that the government pays attention to the country's cultural and historical symbols and decided to stop those who want to impose their extremist beliefs by force and violence," commented 60-year-old Zoubaida Salhi.

"However, we blame the government for its delay, and all that we want now is to hold to account those perpetrators and to secure our religious heritage. The government shouldn't sympathise with the perpetrators for election-related interests," he added.

In his turn, Mohamed Boudhni, 66, said, "The state, which is the protector of the country's security, history and religion, must shoulder its responsibility in full because attacking shrines and mausoleums is a red line, and is a crime against our Islamic heritage. Therefore, it has to apply the law on those involved in these attacks and not to suffice with condemnations."

Last Friday, the Tunisian government spoke out against the wave of salafist violence.

The Sufi sites were "part of the national memory in its cultural and civilizational depth, and we can't allow anyone to attack and burn them based on controversial religious and doctrinal justifications, as these things have never been an issue for Tunisians who are

known for their moderation in thought, faith and behaviour," a government statement said.

Over the past several months, scores of historic Sufi shrines have been desecrated, including the Sidi Bou Said al-Beji mausoleum, a tourist landmark.

The Union of Sufi Orders in Tunisia blamed these attacks on salafists, who they said were applying their interpretation of Sharia, which views the mausoleums and shrines as idolatrous.

Mazen Cherif, vice-head of the Sufi Orders Union in Tunisia, believes that those extremists have a strategy to change the country to fit their radical vision.

"It's the beginning because after that, they will destroy archaeological places in Carthage and El Jem," he said. "They will also force men to grow beards and women to wear the niqab."

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/01/30/feature-01

- **Terrorists target Algeria gas pipeline**

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

- **Mali's president rules out talks with Islamists**

Mali's interim president ruled out talks with Islamist groups who ruled the north for nine months, but said he was ready to

meet Tuareg activists from the region, in comments broadcast Thursday.

President Dioncounda Traore set out his position in an interview with French radio station RFI after France called for peace talks between Mali's government and "legitimate representatives" from the north.

Traore said he was ready for talks with the secular Tuaregs of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).

But he would not meet any of the three Al Qaeda-linked groups that seized northern Mali last year, including the homegrown group Ansar Dine, (Defenders of the Faith).

"It is obvious that Ansar Dine is now disqualified, not eligible for dialogue, whatever clothes they come garbed in," Traore said.

On Wednesday, with French troops at Kidal, the last of the major northern towns still held by the Islamists, Paris called for the dialogue to start.

"Only a north-south dialogue will prepare the ground for the Malian state to return to the north of the country," foreign ministry spokesman Philippe Lalliot said.

Bamako should talk to "non-terrorist armed groups" that recognised the integrity of Mali, he said.

Kidal, 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) northeast of the capital Bamako, was until recently controlled by the Islamists of Ansar Dine. Now the newly formed Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA) claims control of the city and on Wednesday a spokesman said its leader was speaking to the French forces there.

The MIA on Monday announced it had split from Ansar Dine, saying it rejected "extremism and terrorism" and wanted a peaceful solution to Mali's crisis.

On Wednesday, it appealed to the international community to prevent the deployment of Malian and West African troops in the Kidal region before a political solution had been found.

But Traore told RFI: "This MIA story doesn't hold water.

"Because fear has now changed sides, they are looking for a way out," he said.

"The only group we would consider holding negotiations with definitely is the MNLA, provided the MNLA waives all territorial claims," he said.

It was the MNLA who launched offensive in the north of the country in January 2012 in pursuit of an independent homeland for the Tuareg people.

They quickly worked their way south, virtually unopposed following a March coup in Bamako.

But they were quickly overpowered by former allies Ansar Dine and two other Islamist groups, who pushed them out of the northern cities and imposed a brutal form of Islamic law there.

Offenders suffered whippings, amputations and in some cases were executed. In the ancient city of Timbuktu, Islamists destroyed sacred shrines they considered idolatrous.

France swept to Mali's aid on January 11 after an Islamist advance south towards Bamako sparked fears the whole country could become a haven for terrorists. They now have 3,500 troops on the ground.

Mali's parliament on Tuesday adopted a political roadmap which included a commitment to holding July 31 elections and negotiations with representatives of the north.

France, which welcomed that development, is pushing for a political settlement between the provisional government in Bamako and the Tuaregs in the north, who want a degree of self-rule.

And after a swift campaign in which French-led forces forced the Islamists from the northern cities into the vast desert wilderness, Paris is ready to hand over military duties to an incoming multinational African force.

Lack of cash and equipment has hampered deployment of nearly 6,000 west African troops under the African-led force for Mali (AFISMA).

But Nigeria's General Shehu Abdulkadir, commander of the force, said Wednesday they could be in place within two weeks.

Several countries had offered help airlifting the troops in and if they delivered on their pledges, he said: "I'm sure... that in the next two weeks, the troops will be fully in their various locations."

Niger's Defense Minister Karidjo Mahamadou meanwhile told AFP Wednesday the country was ready to host a base the US wants in order to operate drones to monitor movements by the Al-Qaeda-linked groups in the region.

"If Niger has an opportunity to receive support in the shape of aircraft or drones to monitor suspicious movements from Mali, we will not turn our nose up at it," he told AFP.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/international/malis_president_rules_out_talks_with_islamists

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Kataeb MP: Hariri-Gemayel meeting consolidates March 14 alliance**

Kataeb bloc MP Elie Marouni said that the recent meeting between their party leader and Future Movement leader consolidated the alliance between the two parties.

“We are bound to March 14, and the meeting between [Kataeb Party leader] Amin Gemayel and Future Movement leader Saad Hariri in Paris highlights this alliance between us,” Marouni told Future television on Thursday.

“The electoral law issue will not spoil this alliance.”

On Tuesday, Gemayel said that his meeting with Hariri the day before was “fruitful,” adding that the discussions addressed various local issues, such as the issue of the electoral law, and the implications of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon.

Disagreement over electoral law proposals have hit the March 14 alliance after the Future Movement and Progressive

Socialist Party have voiced their opposition to electoral laws based on proportional voting, while Lebanon’s four major Christian parties—Future Movement’s allies the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb—have expressed support for the Orthodox Gathering law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

Members of the parliamentary sub-committee began early in January with their discussions of different draft laws in an effort to choose a proposal that will replace the 1960 electoral law currently on the books. The country’s political circles remain divided over which law to adopt in spite of the cabinet’s approval in September of 2012 of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

On Wednesday, the joint parliamentary commissions decided to extend the work of the electoral sub-committee for an additional 15 days after the latter had finalized its report for submission to the commissions.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/kataeb_mp_hariri-

[gemayel_meeting_consolidates_march_14_alliance](#)

• **Lebanese MP: No signs of division within March 14**

March 14 MP Michel Pharaon dismissed rumors of a rift emerging within the opposition alliance over the electoral law issue.

“Divergences in points of view between the March 14 constituent factions could not be described as ‘division,’ since what brings these forces together is much bigger than the sessions of the joint parliamentary commissions. This is true especially given the fact that several electoral law proposals are now on the table” Pharaon said in remarks published by Kuwaiti daily As-Seyassah on Thursday.

“[Future Movement leader MP Saad] Hariri and other opposition leaders are working on a consensus that would resolve the electoral law issue, while the government and the other side [do not want] to commit to a solution that would guarantee the smooth work of [state] institutions, as well as civil peace.”

Disagreement over electoral law proposals have hit the March 14 alliance after the Future Movement and Progressive Socialist Party have voiced their opposition to electoral laws based on proportional voting, while Lebanon’s four major Christian parties—Future Movement’s allies the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb—have expressed support for the Orthodox Gathering law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

Members of the parliamentary sub-committee began early in January with their discussions of different draft laws in an effort to choose a proposal that will replace the 1960 electoral law currently on the books. The country’s political circles remain divided over which law to adopt in spite of the cabinet’s approval in September of 2012 of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

On Wednesday, the joint parliamentary commissions decided to extend the work of the electoral sub-committee for an additional 15 days after the latter had finalized its report for submission to the commissions.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese_mp_no_signs_of_division_within_march_14

- **Future bloc MPs lambast FPM over electoral law stance**

Future bloc lawmakers on Thursday lashed out at the Free Patriotic Movement for its endorsement of the Orthodox law electoral proposal.

“The FPM’s adamant support for the limiting of discussion pertaining to the Orthodox law... disrupted and complicated [parliamentary] work and led to the spread of both tensions and concern,” Jamal al-Jarrah said in remarks published by Al-Anbaa newspaper.

“The March 8 forces have insisted on backing this proposal because it allows them to secure a parliamentary majority regardless of all national considerations.”

MP Atef Majdalani also lambasted the FPM and its leader MP Michel Aoun, saying that the Orthodox law would show the true magnitude of the latter’s Christian electoral support.

“The last person who wishes elections to be held according to the [Orthodox] law is Aoun, since this law shows [the true] Christian support and does not present him as the first [Christian] leader,” The Future MP said in remarks published by Kuwaiti daily As-Seyassah on Wednesday.

The Future Movement and Progressive Socialist Party have voiced their opposition to electoral laws based on proportional voting, while Lebanon’s four major Christian parties—including the FPM and Future Movement’s allies the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb—have expressed support for the Orthodox Gathering law, which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

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https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnewsfuture_bloc_mps_lambast_fpm_over_electoral_law_stance

6. SYRIA

- **Israel hits Syria arms convoy to Lebanon**

BEIRUT (Reuters) -- Israeli forces attacked a convoy on the Syrian-Lebanese border on Wednesday, sources told Reuters, after Israelis warned Hezbollah against using chaos in Syria to acquire anti-aircraft missiles or chemical weapons.

"The target was a truck loaded with weapons, heading from Syria to Lebanon," said one Western diplomat, adding that the consignment seemed unlikely to have included chemical weapons.

A source among rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar Assad said an air strike around dawn blasted a convoy on a mountain track about three miles south of where the main Damascus-Beirut highway crosses the border. Its load probably included high-tech anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles.

"It attacked trucks carrying sophisticated weapons from the regime to Hezbollah," the source said, adding that it took place inside Syria, though the border is poorly defined in the area.

A security official in the region also placed the attack on the Syrian side. A Lebanese security official denied any strike in Lebanon. It was not clear whether special forces took part.

The Israeli government declined comment on the issue.

Such a strike would fit its existing policy of pre-emptive covert and overt action to curb Iranian-backed Hezbollah and does not necessarily indicate a major escalation of the war in Syria. It does, however, indicate how the erosion of Assad's family

rule after 42 years is seen by Israel as posing a threat.

Some analysts suggested Hezbollah was moving its own arms caches from stores in Syria, fearing rebels would overrun them.

Though Israel this week echoed concerns in the United States about Syrian chemical weapons, officials say a more immediate worry is that the civil war could see weapons that are capable of denting its massive superiority in airpower and tanks from reaching Hezbollah; the group fought Israel in 2006 and remains a more pressing threat than its Syrian and Iranian sponsors.

Wednesday's strike could have been a rapid response to an opportunity. But a stream of Israeli comment on Syria in recent days was a reminder of a standing policy of pre-emptive strikes and may have been intended to limit surprise in world capitals.

The head of the Israeli air force said only hours before the strike that his corps, which has an array of the latest jet bombers, attack helicopters and unmanned drones at its disposal, was

involved in a covert "campaign between wars".

"This campaign is 24/7, 365 days a year," Maj.-Gen. Amir Eshel told a conference on Tuesday. "We are taking action to reduce the immediate threats, to create better conditions in which we will be able to win the wars, when they happen."

Jets over Lebanon

In Israel, where media operate under military censorship, broadcasters immediately relayed international reports of the strike. Channel Two television quoted what it called foreign sources saying the convoy was carrying anti-aircraft missiles.

In Lebanon, the army reported a heavy presence of Israeli jets over its territory throughout the night, following several days of increased incursions into Lebanese airspace. Israeli jets routinely fly and there have been unconfirmed reports in previous years of air strikes on Hezbollah arms shipments.

An Israeli attack inside Syria could be diplomatically provocative, particularly

since Assad's Iranian ally said on Saturday that it would view such a strike as an attack on itself. Israel views Iran as its principal enemy and is engaged in a bitter confrontation over Tehran's nuclear program.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is set for a new term after an election earlier this month, told his cabinet that both developments in Iran and turmoil in Arab states, notably Syria and Egypt, meant Israel must be strong.

"In the east, north and south, everything is in ferment, and we must be prepared, strong and determined in the face of all possible developments," he said.

The Israeli military confirmed this week that it had lately deployed two batteries of its Iron Dome rocket-interceptor system to around the northern city of Haifa, which came under heavy Hezbollah missile fire during a brief war in 2006.

Israel's refusal to comment on Wednesday is usual in such cases; it has, for example, never admitted a 2007 airstrike on a suspected Syrian nuclear site despite US confirmation of it.

By not confirming that raid, Israel may have ensured that Assad did not feel obliged to retaliate. For 40 years, Syria has offered little but bellicose words against Israel. A failing Assad administration, some Israelis fear, might be tempted into more action, while Syria's Islamist rebels are also hostile to Israel and could present a threat if they seize heavier weapons.

Israeli Vice Premier Silvan Shalom said on Sunday that any sign that the Syrian army's grip on its presumed chemical weapons stocks was slipping could trigger Israeli intervention.

But Israeli sources said on Tuesday that Syria's advanced conventional weapons, much of it Russian-built hardware able to destroy Israeli planes and tanks, would represent as much of a threat to Israel as chemical arms in the wrong hands.

Interviewed on Wednesday, Shalom would not be drawn on whether Israeli forces had been in action in the north, instead describing the country as part of an international coalition seeking to stop spillover from Syria's two-year-old insurgency.

Recalling that President Barack Obama had warned Assad of US action if his forces use chemical weapons, Shalom told Israel Radio: "The world, led by President Obama, who has said this more than once, is taking all possibilities into account.

"Any development ... in a negative direction would be something that needs stopping and prevention."

Lebanon war

During the 2006 war in Lebanon, Israeli aircraft faced little threat, though its navy was taken aback when a missile hit a ship. Israeli tanks suffered losses to rockets, and commanders are concerned Hezbollah may get better weaponry.

In what might have been a sign of seeking to reassure major powers, Israeli media reported this week that the country's national security adviser was dispatched to Russia and military intelligence chief to the United States for consultations.

Shashank Joshi of the Royal United Services Institute in London saw any strike on Wednesday as intended to deliver a

signal rather than heralding a major escalation from Israel.

"I think the Israelis are sending a message not just to Hezbollah, but also to Assad's forces, that they have no wish to get dragged in, but chemical weapons and certain types of missiles are a red line for them, and that regime forces ought to signal, in turn, to Hezbollah that they should proceed with caution," he said.

Worries about Syria and Hezbollah have sent Israelis lining up for government-issued gas masks. According to the Israel post office, which is handling distribution of the kits, demand roughly trebled this week.

"It looks like every kind of discourse on this or that security matter contributes to public vigilance," its deputy director Haim Azaki told Israel's Army Radio. "We have really seen a very significant jump in demand."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560710>

- **Hezbollah condemns Israeli strike in Syria**

BEIRUT (Reuters) -- Lebanon's Hezbollah condemned on Thursday an Israeli attack which it said targeted a Syrian research center, saying it was an attempt to thwart Arab military capabilities and pledging to stand by its ally President Bashar Assad.



"Hezbollah expresses its full solidarity with Syria's leadership, army and people," it said in a statement.

Sources said on Wednesday that Israeli jets bombed a convoy near Syria's border with Lebanon, apparently targeting weapons destined for Hezbollah. Syria denied the reports, saying the target had been a military research center.

Hezbollah said the attack showed that the conflict in Syria, where Assad is confronting an armed uprising, was part of a scheme "to destroy Syria and its army

and foil its pivotal role in the resistance front (against Israel)."

The attack should make Assad's opponents realize the danger of targeting Syria, Hezbollah said, and focus instead on "political dialogue as the sole basis to halt the bloodshed".

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=560796>

- **'Assad transferred chemical weapons to Hezbollah'**

'Al-Watan' reports Syrian regime passed non-conventional weapons to the group in 2012, including missiles, mustard gas.

The Kuwait-based newspaper Al-Watan on Thursday reported that the Syrian regime has transferred non-conventional weapons to Hezbollah.

Al-Watan, quoting unnamed sources from the Syrian opposition, reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad has been transferring weapons to Hezbollah since the beginning of 2012, including two tons of mustard gas and long-range missiles capable of carrying chemical warheads and traveling 300 kilometers.

The Syrian opposition sources also claimed that the transfer to Hezbollah lasted 40 days, from mid-February to March 2012, the daily reported.

<http://www.ipost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=301624>

- **Turkmen in joint battle 'for Syria democracy'**

Members of Syria's Turkmen minority have joined forces with rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad's regime in a struggle they say is for democracy and revenge for years of oppression.

"We've been fighting since 1963 [when a coup brought the Baath party to power], first with our voices and, since the start of the revolution, with arms," said a Turkmen rebel chief in northern Syria's embattled Aleppo province.

"We want to overthrow Assad's regime and set up a democracy in Syria, where all ethnic and religious groups can live together in peace," Mahmoud Suleiman told AFP.

Around 750 men have joined Suleiman's Turkmen battalion in the city of Aleppo, Syria's one-time commercial hub, he said, adding that more than 3,000 others are fighting in the rest of the northern province.

Most members of the Sunni Muslim Turkmen community, which numbers about 200,000 across Syria, live in the north, near the Turkish border. Others live in central Hama and Homs, coastal Latakia and Tartus, and Raqa in the northeast.

Syria is home to a patchwork of ethnic and religious groups, and analysts have warned of the rise of communal tensions in the country's conflict that in almost two years has left more than 60,000 people dead, according to UN figures.

In the north, Islamist-led rebels have been pitted against Kurdish militiamen in several rounds of fighting in Aleppo and Hasake in northeastern Syria since last November.

The clashes have raised suspicions among rebels that Kurdish fighters have joined ranks with Assad's forces, although the

Kurds have repeatedly claimed neutrality in Syria's conflict.

"We are not fighting the regime to create a state only for the Turkmens...and we will not allow the Kurds to expel us from our homes and our land," said Suleiman.

The rebel commander said Turkmens have suffered for 40 years under Syria's dictatorship, first under former president Hafez al-Assad, and since 2000 under his son Bashar.

"Hafez took our lands to give them to members of (his minority) Alawite community in Latakia," Suleiman charged.

"He banned our language and stopped us from learning about our history and culture. He stripped us of our rights and changed our villages' names into Arabic names," he said.

"The authorities believed they had the right to detain us, interrogate us and take away our land," said Tareq Sulo, who commands a battalion in Hanano, a majority Turkmen district of Aleppo city.

"Now, we are fighting to avenge years of oppression."

The Turkmens of Syria originate from Turkey, which the Turkmen fighters see as their protector. Most of them today speak Arabic, although their original language was Turkish.

According to Paris-based Syria expert Fabrice Balanche, some Turkmens, like other landowners in Syria, had their lands confiscated and redistributed among the peasantry under a land reform initiated by Hafez al-Assad.

"But there was never an expropriation of Turkmen-owned land to benefit the Alawites," said Balanche.

But the regime has pushed the Turkmens, who constitute one percent of the total population, to settle in the cities in order to "Arabize" them.

The researcher also pointed out that three members of key opposition group, the Syrian National Council, are Turkmen, the same number as the Kurds, who constitute 15 percent of Syria's population.

In Aleppo city, Turkmen fighters limit contacts with the most extremist anti-Assad groups, such as Al-Nusra Front which the United States has listed as a "terrorist" organization.

"We're working for the same goal -- to defeat Assad. If they need support in the city, we send men to provide backup," Sulo told AFP. "But their ideology is different from ours, so our relationship only goes as far as it needs."

"We are part of the [mainstream rebel] Free Syrian Army ... We want a new country ... for all Syrians."

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/turkmen_in_joint_battle_for_syria_democracy

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Dialogue is serious step forward: Bahrain crown prince**

Number of participants could reach 24 with more seats for societies

Manama: Bahrain remains committed to a proposed national dialogue as a "serious step forward," Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa has said.

The comprehensive approach to the dialogue is premised on the fact that all sides are aware of their responsibility towards the stability of the country and the sustainability of its achievements with a focus on the higher national interests as the ultimate goal that requires rational ideas and the shunning of violence, he said, Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported.

According to the crown prince who was meeting UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the donor conference for Syrian refugees, the report issued by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), an international fact-finding panel, was a standard adopted by Bahrain to move forward in achieving further progress in several areas and recover, in cooperation with the competent international organisations, from the challenges related to past events.

The BICI, made up of five international experts, was set up in June, 2011, by King

Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa to look into the events that unfolded in February and March that year and their consequences.

Following four months of field work and thousands of interviews, the commission issued a searing report that included a narrative of what happened and a series of recommendations.

King Hamad accepted the report and called for the prompt and full implementation of the recommendations.

In Manama, reports on Thursday said that the number of the participants in the expected national dialogue in Bahrain could rise to 24.

Initial claims referred to 20 participants, 12 from registered political societies and eight independent personalities.

However, there is now talk in the Bahraini capital about boosting the number of society representatives to 16, eight from each of the two alliances expected to sit at the discussion table.

In a move aimed at strengthening their stances at the expected dialogue, ten

other political societies formed the National Alliance and said that they would give the names of their representatives over the weekend following a series of consultations.

At the other side of the political spectrum, six opposition societies formed an alliance and said that they welcomed the dialogue.

However, in their letter to the justice minister, they referred to it as “negotiations” and not “dialogue.”

The societies offered their views on the dialogue and insisted on the participation of the government as interlocutors and not as coordinators.

The official spokesperson for the government last week said that it would oversee the dialogue, but not be part of it.

The opposition also called for adopting the dialogue outcome as constitutional formulas and not recommendations and wanted the participants to go beyond the political discussions to include other matters.

The justice ministry last week announced that it started contacting the political formations in the country to nominate their representatives at the talks that will address political issues.

However, more than one week after the ministry's request, the societies have not forwarded the names amid a flurry of consultations to set terms and reach pre-dialogue agreements.

The government has been saying that the dialogue would be a new round of talks that would continue the earlier rounds held in July, 2011, and that addressed the economic, social and human rights issues.

Around 300 people took part in the talks and endorsed a set of recommendations that included amending the constitution to empower the elected lower chamber over the appointed upper chamber, a key demand by the opposition.

The constitutional recommendations were implemented last year.

However, the move towards holding a new dialogue that will help heal the deep social, political and economic scars that

marked relations between the various communities within Bahrain for almost two years has been challenged by radicals.

In December, Crown Prince Salman who had pushed without success for talks amid all parties four days into the February, 2011, unrest, stressed that dialogue between all sides in Bahrain was the only way forward.

"I believe that dialogue is the only way forward," he said. "Geopolitically, demographically and historically, the differing political views represented in disparate political groups here in Bahrain must be reconciled. They will only be reconciled by sitting together and agreeing a framework where the limit of what is acceptable is the limit of what is unacceptable to the other, with the ultimate goal being to reach an agreement," Prince Salman said as he opened the Manama Dialogue, an international security conference held in Bahrain annually.

He insisted on the importance of all sides holding a meeting to address divergences.

“I am not a prince of Sunni Bahrain; I am not a prince of Shiite Bahrain. I am a prince of the kingdom of Bahrain and all mean a great deal to me personally,” he said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/dialogue-is-serious-step-forward-bahrain-crown-prince-1.1140155>

- **Al Barrak supporters protest at trial venue**

Demonstration outside judicial precincts unprecedented in Kuwait

Kuwait City: Dozens of Kuwaiti activists staged an unprecedented protest on Monday outside the courtroom where opposition leader and former MP Mussallam Al Barrak was being tried on charges of insulting the emir.

“Jail us in place of Mussallam Al Barrak,” chanted the activists who were prevented entry into the small courtroom in the Palace of Justice in the heart of Kuwait City.

“Mussallam ... you are the conscience of the whole nation,” the firebrand lawmaker’s supporters shouted.

It was the first time ever that a protest has taken place inside the Palace of Justice in Kuwait. Police did not interfere in the demonstration, which passed off peacefully.

Barrak is being tried on charges of insulting Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah when he made remarks at a public rally on October 15.

Activists carried Al Barrak as he came from the room and continued shouting slogans.

“On your behalf and on behalf of the nation, I declare that this [protest] movement will continue. Jails, batons and tear gas cannons will not stop us,” Barrak told the crowd just outside the Palace of Justice.

“We are not against the regime but against corruption ... This is a war against corruption and corrupt people ... who are trying to steal the future of Kuwait,” he said. “It’s time that people are allowed to manage their affairs through an elected government.”

Thamer Al Jadaei, Barrak's main counsel in a 40-strong legal team, said the court had set the next hearing for February 11 to hear the final defence arguments.

If the court convicts Al Barrak, he faces a jail term of up to five years.

The opposition figure was detained for five days in October after making the remarks but was later released on bail of \$35,500 (Dh130,356) and banned from leaving Kuwait.

The court is slated to issue its verdict on February 5 against three former opposition MPs who face similar charges.

Earlier this month, the court sentenced two opposition youth activists to two years in jail each for making tweets deemed insulting to the emir. Dozens of other tweeters face similar charges.

Kuwait's opposition has been staging protests to demand the dissolution of the parliament elected last month on the basis of an electoral law that was amended by the emir.

The opposition claims that the change is not legal and is aimed at electing a pliant parliament.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/al-barrak-supporters-protest-at-trial-venue-1.1138951>

- **Parliament session suspended over holiday wishes**

Manama: Kuwait's parliament session was suspended for 15 minutes after two lawmakers sparred over the merit of exchanging wishes on the birthday of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

MP Saleh Ashoor started his speech at the session on Wednesday by offering his congratulations to Muslims on the occasion.

However, he was cut off by fellow lawmaker Khalid Al Shalimi who said that the wishes were an unwelcome innovation that did not exist at the times of the prophet and as such should not be taken up by Muslims.

However, Saleh rejected the claim and insisted on his wishes.

Article continues below

“What are we talking about here?” the MP asked as he addressed the parliament. “The government announced that Thursday would be an official day off to mark the Prophet’s birthday. So if we are talking about an unwelcome innovation, there should be no day off on Thursday. We have to talk sense. There were no parliaments or planes during the Prophet’s era and yet we are talking about them. I do not care what others say. Al Shalimi is not tolerant,” he said.

Al Shalimi rejected the accusation.

“I am tolerant, but you are not. Do not teach me my religion. Sit down and keep quiet,” he said.

The stand-off continued for some time before the session was suspended until the lawmakers had time to calm down.

The quarrel was a reflection of the deep divisions within the Muslim world over the occasion.

Most Muslims celebrate the anniversary by exchanging wishes, while in Tunisia,

Algeria and Morocco families prepare a special birthday pudding that they share with friends and neighbours.

However, conservative Muslims insist that only the eid at the end of Ramadan and the eid on the tenth day of the pilgrimage month should be celebrated in the Islamic world. All other celebrations, national or religious, should not be marked or tolerated, they say.

Salafi groups have been using social networks to discourage Muslims from celebrating the Prophet’s birthday, claiming it is an emulation of unwelcome behaviour by non-Muslims.

However, moderate Muslims dispute the arguments and insist on the tolerant values of Islam and the compassionate character of Muslims.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/parliament-session-suspended-over-holiday-wishes-1.1137276>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Two Afghans killed in US-led nighttime operation**

Press TV

January 30, 2013

US-led foreign soldiers in Afghanistan have killed at least two people in a nighttime operation carried out in the eastern part of the country, Press TV reports.

The incident took place on Tuesday night in a district in Nangarhar Province. The US-led forces also arrested nine other Afghans during the operation.

The latest incident of violence in Afghanistan came nearly four days after US-led troops carried out a similar night-raid operation in the eastern province of Logar. Three Afghan brothers were killed during the operation.

An Afghan governor confirmed the operation and said the three victims had been in a taxi when foreign forces opened fire on them on January 26.

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai ordered an investigation into the raid.

Over the past few months, night raids by US-led forces have resulted in civilian

casualties in Afghanistan. The raids have increased tensions 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 rages on across the country.

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

- **Afghan army casualties reduced by 1.9 percent: Azimi**

By Sadaf Shinwari - 30 Jan 2013, 3:28 pm

Khaama Press

According to Afghan defense officials, there has been a slight reduction in Afghan national army casualties during the past three months.

Gen. Zahir Azimi defense ministry spokesman on Wednesday said at least 160 Afghan national army soldiers were killed during the past three months.

Mr. Azimi further added the statistics shows a reduction of 1.9% as compared to last year where 179 Afghan national army soldiers were killed during the same period.

He also said at least 463 Afghan national army soldiers have been killed during the past six months while 472 Afghan soldiers were killed last year.

According to Gen. Zahir Azimi increased capabilities of the Afghan national army soldiers are the main reason behind a reduction in Afghan soldiers casualties.

Mr. Azimi also said that Afghan national army soldiers are equipped with modern facilities which are unique in the region.

In response to United Nations report regarding civilians casualties during Afghan soldiers operations Mr. Azimi denying the report said the casualties have dramatically reduced during Afghan army operations.

Gen. Zahir Azimi said United Nations has also allocated civilians casualties who have

been killed by unknown people to Afghan army.

In regards to United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report regarding prisoners torture in Afghan jails defense ministry spokesman denied the report and said prisoners are neither tortured nor humiliated.

He also called on the organizations to present evidence regarding their claims.

In the meantime defense ministry spokesman Gen. Zahir Azimi said defense minister Gen. Bismillah Mohammadi's tour to Pakistan was a step to improve bilateral relations between the two nations.

This comes as local media agencies in Pakistan have reported that Pakistani and Afghan officials have agreed to reach a deal on training Afghan security forces however Mr. Azimi said the two sides have not signed any agreement so far.

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

- **UNAMA's new Office compound in Bamyan inaugurated**

By UNAMA Bamyán

30 January 2013 – United Nations and provincial officials inaugurated a new office compound of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the country's Central Highlands province of Bamyán today.

United Nations flag was raised during an official opening ceremony attended by the Governor of Bamyán province, the head of the Afghan security forces in Bamyán, heads of government line departments, UN agencies and other local partners of UNAMA.

“The inauguration of UNAMA's new compound in Bamyán is not only the manifestation of increasing attention which UNAMA gives to the region and its commitment to be present here,” said Elena Drozdik, the acting head of the UNAMA's Bamyán office, at the ceremony.

“This inauguration is also the manifestation of the local Government's support to the mission of the United Nations in Afghanistan and the demonstration of trust it has for our organization,” added Ms. Drozdik.

The UNAMA office in Bamyán province covers Bamyán and Dai Kundi provinces in central Afghanistan.

Ms. Drozdik also explained to the participants that the newly expanded and modernized compound would increase the effectiveness and productivity of daily operations and activities of UNAMA and the extended UN family in Bamyán.

The Governor of Bamyán province, Dr Habiba Sarabi, congratulated UNAMA officials for opening the new office building.

“I congratulate UNAMA for the opening of new office building that shows the commitment of the United Nations and international community to help the people of Bamyán,” said Dr. Sarabi.

Dr. Sarabi also commended the support and commitment of UNAMA to help the Government and people of Afghanistan in promoting human rights, good governance and democracy.

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

- **Shahid Afridi to feature in Pak-Afghan cricket matches**

By Sajad - 30 Jan 2013, 12:41 pm

Khaama Press

Shahid Afridi Pakistan's senior all-rounded is due to feature in the upcoming one-day and Twenty20 fixtures against Afghanistan during their four-week long training tour of Pakistan in a bid to regain his winning form, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced.

According to PCB officials, Afridi – who was a part of Pakistan's Twenty20 squad against India last month – was included in the Pakistan A team, which is scheduled to play eight one-day and four Twenty20 matches next month.

While the tourists are preparing for their international assignments including the World Cup qualifiers, the PCB selectors felt the upcoming matches could be utilised by giving a chance to its national cricketers who have been out of high-profile action for a while, The Express Tribune reported.

PCB selector quoted by The Express Tribune said, "The purpose of including Afridi in the team is to provide him match practice. We have also included other national cricketers like Wahab Riaz in the squad."

However, the selector made it clear that the performance of players in the upcoming matches against Afghanistan would not necessarily lead to their selection for the forthcoming One-Day International (ODI) and Twenty20 series against South Africa.

Afghanistan cricket team led by Nawroz Mangal and coached by kabir Khan has already reached Lahore for a four week stay. During their visit, the Affhan team will play eight ODIs and four T20 matches against Pakistan A and other sides.

No test playing nation has toured Pakistan since 2009, when gunmen attacked Sri Lanka's team bus convoy at Lahore, killing six police officials and a van driver.

Apart from Afghanistan's three key players – fast bowler Shahpoor Zadran, former captain Mohammad Nabi and Samiullah Shinwari – Khan said the top

22 Afghan players had all come to Pakistan.

Afghanistan have ODI status till 2015 and have been using Sharjah Cricket Stadium as their home ground since 2010 due to a lack of cricketing infrastructure in the country. They are now looking to shift base to Pakistan.

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

ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.

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.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge*